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TRAPEZE TRAGEDY? Sir S. Cripps and Pandit Nehru. (Reproduced by courtesy of the *Hindustan Times)* *page* 50

PREFACE

I WENT to India last autumn to study the constitutional problem under the auspices of Nuffield College. I had spent four months in the country and was on the point of returning home to draft my report when Sir Stafford Cripps arrived. At his request I stayed on and joined his staff. I was thus enabled to observe the work of his Mission at close quarters; and, though it cannot yet be seen in its true historical perspective, it seemed to me worth while to attempt a brief record of it while my impressions were still fresh. Sir Stafford has kindly allowed me to do this on the understanding that it is a personal and wholly unofficial record and that for the statements and opinions it contains the responsibility is solely mine.

R. C.

WOOTTON HILL,
May, 1942.

I. INDIA AND THE WAR

THE purpose of Sir Stafford Cripps' mission to India in the spring of 1942 was to explain to 'the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people' the British Government's proposals for India's attainment of full self-government after the war, and to express in person that Government's desire that, on the basis of the proposals, those leaders should at once and effectively participate 'in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations' for the defence of India and the prosecution of the world war effort as a whole.

In ill-informed quarters the object of the Mission was interpreted more broadly. It was 'to bring India into the war', the implication being that India or the Indians had so far taken little, if any, share in the common war effort. But that, of course, was far from the truth. In the first place, the Central Government of India has contained since last summer, besides its three British official members and the British Commander-in-Chief, eight non-official Indian members, and it has been assisted by an advisory Defence Council of about thirty members, almost all of them Indians. Linked with the Central Government are the eleven Provincial Governments. Seven of these are now purely official Governments owing to the resignation of their Congress Ministers at the outset of the war, but four of them—those of Bengal, the Punjab, Sind, and Orissa—are constitutional Governments composed entirely of Indian Ministers supported by majorities in their elected legislatures and exercising the full provincial autonomy established by the Act of 1935. These Governments are as much 'war governments' as the Central Government, and they have taken their full share in the general war effort. Serving under these war governments at the Centre and in all the Provinces are many thousands of Indian officials, all of them as fully committed to the war effort as their *confreres* in Whitehall.

More directly engaged in it are the Indian officers and men of the Indian Army. From the earliest days of the war its famous regiments have been fighting—in East Africa, in Libya, in the

Middle and Far East. At the time of Sir Stafford's arrival in India the strength of the Indian Army was over one million. Nor was there any shortage of reserves. At least 50,000 recruits were volunteering every month. Far more Indian fighting men, in fact, were and are potentially available than can be provided with arms and equipment within measurable time. The size of the Indian Navy has been increased sixfold, and recruits for the Indian Air Force are again far more numerous than the aircraft available for their use.

Industrial production for war purposes in India has immensely increased since the war began. Indian industry is now supplying no less than 90 per cent of the military equipment of the Indian Army—guns, shells, small-arms ammunition, armoured cars, uniforms, boots, and so forth—and the amount of labour employed is only limited by the factory space and machinery and skilled artisans to hand. Lastly, there has been a steady flow of contribution to the war funds. And in this substantial war effort the Indian States have shared with British India. In all respects they have more than maintained the high standard of war service set in 1914.

Thus, in administration, in military service, in war production the Indian war effort has been as great as the limiting conditions have permitted. Nevertheless, India has not been and is not at war in the same sense as the other Allied countries are at war. To a newcomer fresh from England the difference in the atmosphere, at any rate before the Japanese swept through Malaya to Singapore, was almost startling. In November, 1941, India was as different from England as England was different from what she herself had been, say, in November, 1939.

One reason for this was India's geographical position. Till the Japanese occupied Malaya, the fighting seemed very far away; and it was assumed that in this war, as in the last, British sea-power—and American sea-power at need—would protect the coast of India. But there was a more potent reason than that for the unwarlike atmosphere, a reason which, as will be seen, persisted even when the victorious Japanese drew nearer. Indian public opinion has regarded the war from its outset with a divided mind.

What constitutes, who forms, public opinion in India? The mass of the people, the countless poor and ignorant villagers who

make up nine-tenths of the population, know nothing of 'high policy'. Public opinion on such an issue as the war is the opinion of the relatively small educated minority, and it is shaped mainly by the politicians on the platform and in the Press. Officials and soldiers are necessarily silent. Apart from the short sessions of the Central legislature, the exposition of Government policy is virtually confined to occasional pronouncements by the Viceroy. The field is open, therefore, to the organized political parties and especially to the two dominant parties, the Congress and the Moslem League. There is a body of opinion outside these two main parties which ought to be more influential than in fact it is —the old 'Liberals' who have played so large a part at earlier stages of the constitutional controversy and who are now organized, with that experienced 'elder statesman', Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, at their head, as the 'Non-Party Conference'. But, moderate and reasonable as their views may seem to be, these Liberals are out of the main current of Indian nationalism. Broadly speaking, Hindu public opinion is Congress opinion, and Moslem public opinion is League opinion.

What, then, has been the attitude to the war, and how does it betray a divided mind? As regards Congress and more particularly its great majority of Hindu members, there is, in the first place, the division between pacifists and 'activists'. Mr. Gandhi has long been the most powerful personage in India ; and, if his prestige with the young intelligentsia is not all it was, he is still regarded by the Hindu masses with a kind of mystical veneration. For some years past he has not occupied any official position in the Congress organization ; but the Working Committee, or Congress 'high command', has invariably consulted him on important issues, and only very rarely and with manifest reluctance has it refused to follow his advice. Now, Mr. Gandhi could never be 'in the war'. Though Nazism is the negation of all he stands for, he could not be expected to take an active part in the war effort: for war is the extreme example of the violence he condemns. And this greatest of all wars has naturally prompted him to preach with redoubled earnestness his doctrine of *ahimsa*. Only 'soul force', he declares, will prevail in the long run. No good can be done by any other kind of force. 'An Allied victory', he said to me when I paid my respects to him at his *ashram* near Wardha last January, 'will not make the world a better world.'

One of the most interesting features of Congress policy since the outbreak of war has been its reaction to Mr. Gandhi's idealism. For the first ten months Congress was apparently prepared to take part in the war effort, but only, as will presently be explained, on certain conditions. From the autumn of 1940 to the winter of 1941-2, on the other hand, it adopted Mr. Gandhi's policy of protest against the war, and conducted a campaign of 'non-violent civil disobedience' under Mr. Gandhi's personal direction. But the campaign excited little popular interest, and by the end of 1941 it had petered out. At the meeting of the Working Committee at Bardoli in December, 1941, the majority, led, it is believed, by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who, while devoted to Mr. Gandhi, has never been a pacifist, and by Mr. Rajagopalachari, ex-Premier of Madras, made it clear that, useful weapon as it was against the British Government, they could not commit themselves to 'non-violence' in the face of Japanese aggression. This was a plain defeat for Mr. Gandhi, who asked to be relieved of the active leadership he had assumed.

The second division of mind among Congressmen—and to some extent it affected the League as well—was of quite a different sort. It was a conflict between two hatreds—hatred of Nazi aggression and brutality and hatred of British imperialism. When Hitler struck at Poland, it was evident that he had no friend in the Congress ranks. But nor had Britain. For years past the 'wickedness' of the British Government and the 'insincerity' of its promises to India have been the principal articles in the Congress creed. There was little to choose, they argued, between the combatants: it was a conflict between two imperialisms. The Nazi rape of Europe, the fortitude of the British people after the fall of France, and, above all, the involvement of Russia in the war brought about a certain change of feeling. Congressmen seemed now less neutral-minded. They had never desired a German victory, but now they more earnestly and positively wanted the Allies, especially Russia, to win. But to fight side by side with Russia was to fight side by side with Britain. Worse than that, it was to fight under British leadership and control. India has been committed to the war, they declared, against the people's will. To take an active part in it was to acquiesce in that humiliation.

When the war began, therefore, the measure of co-operation

with the British Government implied by the acceptance of ministerial office in the seven 'Congress Provinces' in 1937 was withdrawn. At the bidding of the Working Committee, all the Congress Ministers resigned. No further co-operation with the Government, in its current administration or in its war effort, was to be considered except on two conditions. First, the independence of India must be declared forthwith. Second, a new constitution must be framed by Indians and Indians only, meeting for the purpose in a Constituent Assembly elected by the whole people. In the summer of 1940 a third demand was made:

> As an immediate step to giving effect to it [the declaration of independence], a provisional National Government should be constituted at the Centre, which, though formed as a transitory measure, should be such as to command the confidence of all the elected elements in the Central Legislature, and secure the closest co-operation of the responsible Governments in the provinces.

The attitude of the British Government towards these demands was explained in a statement issued in the following month and known as the 'August Offer'. It repeated the promise of full Dominion Status and conceded the claim for constitutional self-determination. The framing of a new constitution 'should be primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves', but this lengthy and intricate business could not be undertaken while 'the Commonwealth is engaged in a struggle for existence'. After the war the British Government would welcome the assembly of a representative constituent body 'with the least possible delay', and in the meantime it would do what it could to assist any Indian efforts 'to reach a basis of friendly agreement', both as to the nature of the constitution-making body and as to the principles of the constitution itself.

This offer was rejected out of hand by Congress. 'It widens the gulf', said Mr. Gandhi, 'between India as represented by the Congress and England.' 'It is an insult to India', said Pandit Nehru. Mr. Jinnah, meantime, the head of the Moslem League, maintained the position he had firmly adopted at the outset of the war—nothing must be done without the prior assent of the League. In those old ruts, for a year and more, the controversy dragged on. In both camps 'non-co-operation' was still the watch-

word. The divided mind persisted. Neither the Congress nor the League were 'in the war'. But there was a marked difference between the two. Though the League as such was not co-operating in the war effort, the Moslem Ministers in the Government of the Punjab, the Province which was still providing most recruits for the Indian Army, were still taking their full share in the war effort, and they were all members of the League. No Congressman, on the other hand, held any office. More than that, after its rejection of the 'August Offer', the party committed itself, as has been seen, to a campaign of 'civil disobedience'.

II. DISTRUST AND DISUNION

To any one unacquainted with the mental make-up of Indian nationalism this obdurate refusal of the Congress—apart from its pacifist members—to take any share in the war effort may have seemed rather puzzling. Nobody doubted that a Nazi victory would destroy for an incalculable time all hope of India's freedom. The British Government, on the other hand, had repeatedly promised that India should attain that freedom as soon as possible after the war. In these circumstances and in view of the difficulty of effecting far-reaching constitutional changes in the middle of the war, might not Congress patriots have been content, strained though their patience might already be, to wait just a few years longer, and have done what they could to help in winning the Allied victory which could alone ensure that that quickly coming Indian freedom really came?

The solution of this puzzle is simple. Since the outbreak of the war the distrust, which for more than twenty years had clouded the attitude of Indian nationalists to Britain, had become deeper than it had ever been. The Congress leaders refused to believe that the British promises were sincere. The British Government, they said, did not intend to set India free. An Allied victory would merely enable it to rivet more firmly the chains it did not mean to break. A study of the statements, they declared, in which the promises were made betrayed their insincerity: for in none of them were the promises straightforward and unequivocal; in all of them they were conditional. In the

'August Offer', for example, the enfranchisement of India was made subject to two conditions. First, the new constitution must obtain the assent of the minority communities.

> It goes without saying that they [the British Government] could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a government.

This passage, said Congress critics, demonstrated by itself the falsity of the whole statement. For it evidently referred in the first instance to the greatest of the minorities, the Moslem community, nearly 90 million strong; and Hindu-Moslem discord, which had been created—so they said—by the British Government and persistently fostered on the principle of *divide et impera*, could never be resolved as long as they remained in India. They would see to it, indeed, that it was not resolved and use it as a permanent excuse for never setting India free. Nor was that, said Congressmen, the only equivocation. The British Government's acquiescence in the framing of the new constitution by Indians was 'subject to the due fulfilment of the obligations which Great Britain's long connexion with India has imposed on her'. Much might be covered by these wide phrases—defence, the protection of the minorities once more or the safeguarding of British commercial interests in India—but presumably the principal reference was to the treaties and engagements which guaranteed the rights of the Indian Princes. There lay a second line of defence on which British imperialism was evidently digging itself in. For the Princes—such was the familiar Congress doctrine—were the puppets of the British Government. They had only to be told to cling firmly to those 'moth-eaten' treaties and the enfranchisement of India would be indefinitely postponed.

The promises, therefore, were denounced by Congress as deliberately deceitful. Nor, if they had trusted them, would they have been altogether satisfied. For the freedom offered was in the form of Dominion Status and, since 1921, Congress has demanded *Purna Swaraj*, or complete independence. Mr. Amery's argument that Dominion Status was tantamount to independence made no impression. India, said the Congress

spokesmen, would have nothing more to do with Britain. She did not want to be like Canada. She wanted to be like China.

The depth of this distrust in Congress circles and the bitterness and resentment it had engendered was the first of the two main impressions forced on me by my own experience in India during the winter of 1941-2. I talked at length with many Congressmen, including several of the leaders. Without exception, they treated me in the friendliest manner and answered my questions with the greatest courtesy and patience. But, almost without exception, they seemed to disbelieve what I said. I explained, as best I could, that the full enfranchisement of India at the earliest possible moment was no longer an open question in Britain. Twenty years ago British public opinion had decided once for all to stop arguing about Home Rule for Ireland. Since the outbreak of the war, it had made a similar decision about India. The British people had made up their mind that the process of gradual liberation begun in 1919 and carried far on its course by the Act of 1935 must somehow or other be brought to its conclusion with the least possible delay. Difficulties, risks, vested interests—they must all be overcome or overridden. Could they name any front-rank British statesman, I asked, with the exception of Mr. Churchill—and Mr. Churchill's opinions might have changed since he fought the Government of India Bill in 1935—who was known to withstand this urgent, almost impatient, trend of public opinion? What newspaper of any note opposed it? . . . It was no use. I failed—or so I thought—to alter by a hair's-breadth my hearers' preconceived ideas. One or two of them, it is true, agreed that the British people now felt as I said they felt, but the people, they quickly added, could not have their way. Indian policy was controlled by a reactionary Government, by a narrow-minded 'governing class', and by the 'City' and the agents of British business in Calcutta and Bombay, all determined to keep their old imperial grip on India.

It was the same with Dominion Status. When I was asked to address a University club at Allahabad and a gathering of young graduates at Lahore, I chose that subject as one on which I could speak with some academic authority, and I tried on each occasion to explain that the Dominions were independent sovereign states linked with each other and with Britain only by their free association in the British Commonwealth in a common allegiance to the

Crown, and that, whatever the original intention of the words may have been, 'freely associated' had been proved by events to imply 'freedom to disassociate'. Thus, in fact, India with Dominion Status *would* be as free as China.... My audiences were attentive but unconvinced. What I said might be true of the Dominions, but would it *really* be true of India if she should share their status? Would India *really* be free to break the British connexion altogether if she chose? If so, why did not British statesmen say so?

Distrust of British intentions is, as I have said, an old story, but the war had unfortunately given it a new and sharper edge. Nor, unhappily, was it now confined, as it used to be, to nationalist circles. It is difficult to exaggerate the disquieting effect of one particular incident—Mr. Churchill's statement in September, 1941, that the Atlantic Charter was primarily intended to apply to Europe. The nationalists seized on it, of course, as a clinching proof of British dishonesty. Mr. Churchill's explanation that the authors of the Charter were mainly thinking of the countries which Hitler had invaded and enslaved was contemptuously brushed aside. Mr. Amery's assertion that British policy in India was in full accord with the principles of the Charter was completely ignored. And on this occasion a feeling, if not of distrust, at least of a new and uncomfortable suspicion, began to spread beyond nationalist circles. Moderate-minded Indians, who still valued the British connexion and who had hitherto believed and acquiesced in the policy of the 'gradual realization' of self-government, were shaken, for the moment at any rate, in their faith. One highly intelligent Indian official confessed to me the anxiety and uncertainty which this unfortunate business of the Charter had for the first time implanted in his mind, and I have little doubt that many of his colleagues felt the same. It seemed to me more than probable, too, that many of the young Indians who were obtaining commissions in the fast-expanding Indian Army were affected by something of the same uneasiness about the future.

If the first major impression which any observer of the Indian scene in the winter of 1941-2 was bound to form was the intensification of Indian distrust of the British Government, the second was the intensification of the old antagonism between the two

great Indian communities, the Hindus and the Moslems. Every Indian, whose expressed opinions were not dictated, whatever his inmost thoughts might be, by loyalty to a party creed, told me outright that Hindu-Moslem dissension had never been so bitter since the days before the British came to India. And the reason for the recent accentuation of it is plain enough. Hindu-Moslem rivalry has now become a struggle for political power. As long as the continuance of British rule in India, which, whatever its faults, has at least maintained a neutral authority above the warring communities, was unquestioned, the worst manifestation of communal discord was the occasional outbreak of rioting and bloodshed in the towns. That was bad enough, but there was no constant tension, no general lining-up of forces, no feeling that Hinduism and Islam were at grips. From the moment, however, that the process of transferring power from British to Indian hands began, antagonism stiffened, more especially on the Moslem side; for the Moslems constitute roughly only one-quarter of the population of India, and Indian self-government on the orthodox principle of 'majority rule' means, therefore, Hindu government both at the Centre and in the seven out of eleven Provinces in which the Moslems are in a minority. Now, the new constitution of 1935 has not only freed the Provinces from all but the necessary minimum of control by the Centre; it has made provincial government full and real self-government. Power in every field, including law and order, was now vested in Ministers responsible only to their legislatures, subject only to the Governor's right to intervene and in the last resort to override his Ministers for certain purposes, the most important of which was the protection of minorities. Since, in the event, Governors have rarely had occasion to use that overriding authority, provincial self-government has been an unquestionable reality. That is obvious enough to any one who visits the four Provinces in which the new constitution is still operating. Nor do responsible Congressmen deny that the self-government they exercised from 1937 to 1939 in the 'Congress Provinces' was real. The three Congress ex-Premiers I interviewed frankly admitted it. One Congress ex-Minister said that his Province was as fully self-governing as a Province of the Canadian Federation.

But, if this was a satisfactory position for Hindus in the Hindu-majority Provinces, it was the reverse for Moslems, and the

effect on them was immediate. The League became for the first time the most powerful force in Moslem politics. Previously little more than an association of politicians, it now embraced the Moslem masses. And, as those two years of Congress rule went by, communal temper grew steadily hotter and more dangerous. There were more and bloodier riots, and the tension was no longer felt only in the towns. It is widely believed—and from what I learned I have little doubt that it is true—that, if the Congress Ministries had lasted much longer, there would have been an outbreak of communal violence on an unprecedented scale.

How fiercely the Moslems resented Congress rule was made unmistakable when the Ministries resigned. Inquiries were conducted by the League and long lists of 'atrocities' committed against Moslems drawn up and published. An impartial investigator would come, I think, to the conclusion that many of those charges were exaggerated or of little serious moment, that many of the incidents complained of were due to irresponsible members of the Congress party, and that the case against the Congress Governments as deliberately pursuing an anti-Moslem policy was certainly not proved. The real grievance, in fact, was not so much that Moslems were harshly or even unfairly treated as that they were excluded from the share of power to which they felt themselves entitled. However that may be, the indictment of Congress rule was all too easily credited by the Moslem rank and file, and Mr. Jinnah, who had rapidly become the unrivalled leader of the Moslems throughout India, drove the lesson home by declaring on the League's behalf that the end of Congress rule in the Provinces should be solemnly celebrated every year by the observance of a 'Deliverance Day'.

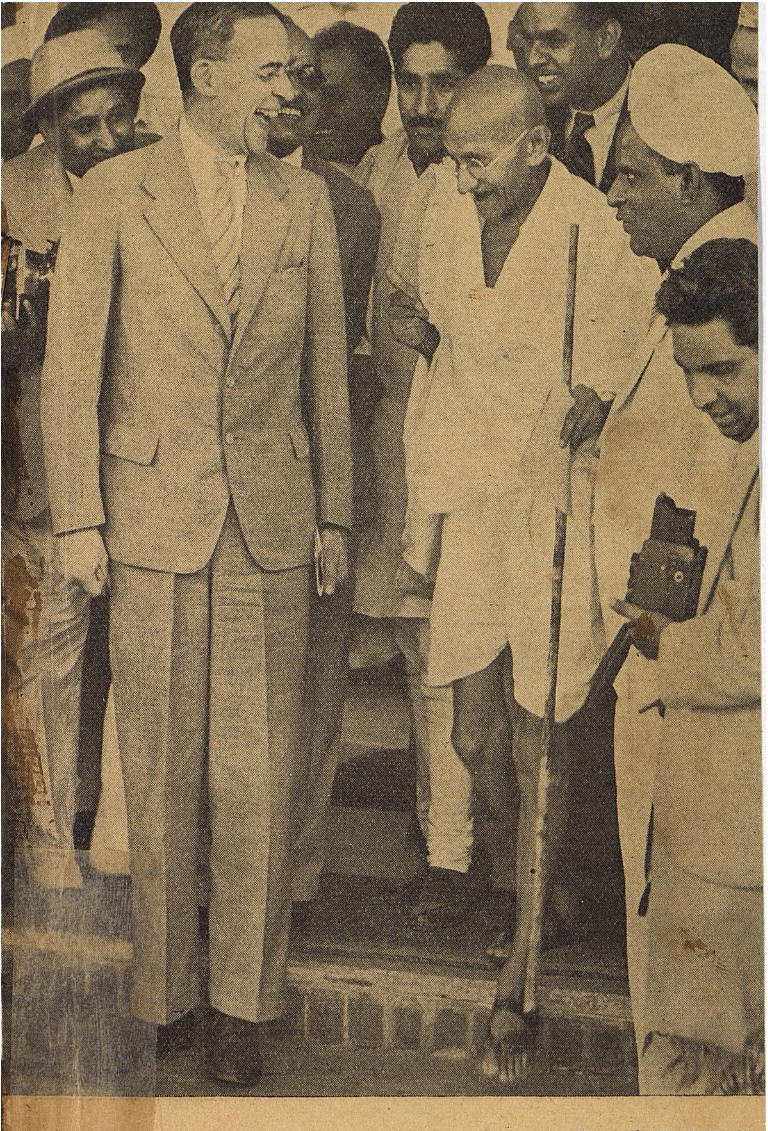
The Moslem reaction to the introduction of unqualified 'majority rule' went farther than that. The very idea of being a 'minority' was now repudiated. The Indian Moslems, said Mr. Jinnah, were not a minor section of an Indian nation. They were themselves a nation, stamped as such by their faith and ways of life and all the primary distinctive attributes of nationhood. And, like other nations, they possessed a national homeland—those areas in north-west and north-east India in which Moslems were in a majority. Thus what had hitherto been only a vague dream, a theme for poets or young visionaries, became suddenly a definite

political objective—Pakistan. There is more than one conception of what Pakistan means, but the official definition—Mr. Jinnah himself explained it very lucidly to me—is a Moslem State or States comprising the North-West Frontier Province, the Punjab, and Sind on the one side of India and Bengal on the other. Those Moslem States, with modified boundaries, would share on an equal footing with 'Hindustan' in the coming enfranchisement of India. They would constitute a distinct dominion or dominions. There would be no all-India government at all.

The project was instantly condemned by the Hindus. Never would they acquiesce, said Congressmen, in 'the vivisection of Mother India'. Still more vociferous was the Mahasabha, the militant Hindu organization which has always maintained that all India is Hindustan and belongs to the Hindus. For some time past its leaders have denounced as a vice that very non-communalism which Congress boasts as a virtue. Congress, they say, is an unfaithful servant of Hinduism, and it is one more proof of the existing communal tension that the Mahasabha, which not very long ago had little weight in Indian politics, has been growing fast in membership and influence. Its policy is quite frankly communal. 'Our Moslem countrymen should realize', says its fiery President, Mr. Savarkar,[1] 'that even in their own interests they should accept the inevitable', i.e. their position as a permanent minority in an undivided India ; and, to ensure that they should do so, he demands that the Hindus should be armed in the same proportion as the Moslems.

The adoption of Pakistan as the League's objective has tended to stiffen the political deadlock. It was already difficult enough for Mr. Jinnah to co-operate with the Government's war effort, unless Congress did, for it would expose him to the charge—a wholly false charge, as his record shows—of being a poorer Indian patriot than Pandit Nehru and his colleagues. But there was now another difficulty. To join the existing Central Government, associated as it is with a Central legislature, both based on the principle of a united India, would prejudice the future of the Moslem cause. It would seem like a tacit acceptance of a constitutional system which foreshadowed the imposition, not only on seven Provinces, but on India as a whole, of that Hindu majority rule which Pandit Nehru in an unguarded moment

[1] *Hindu*, December 24, 1941.



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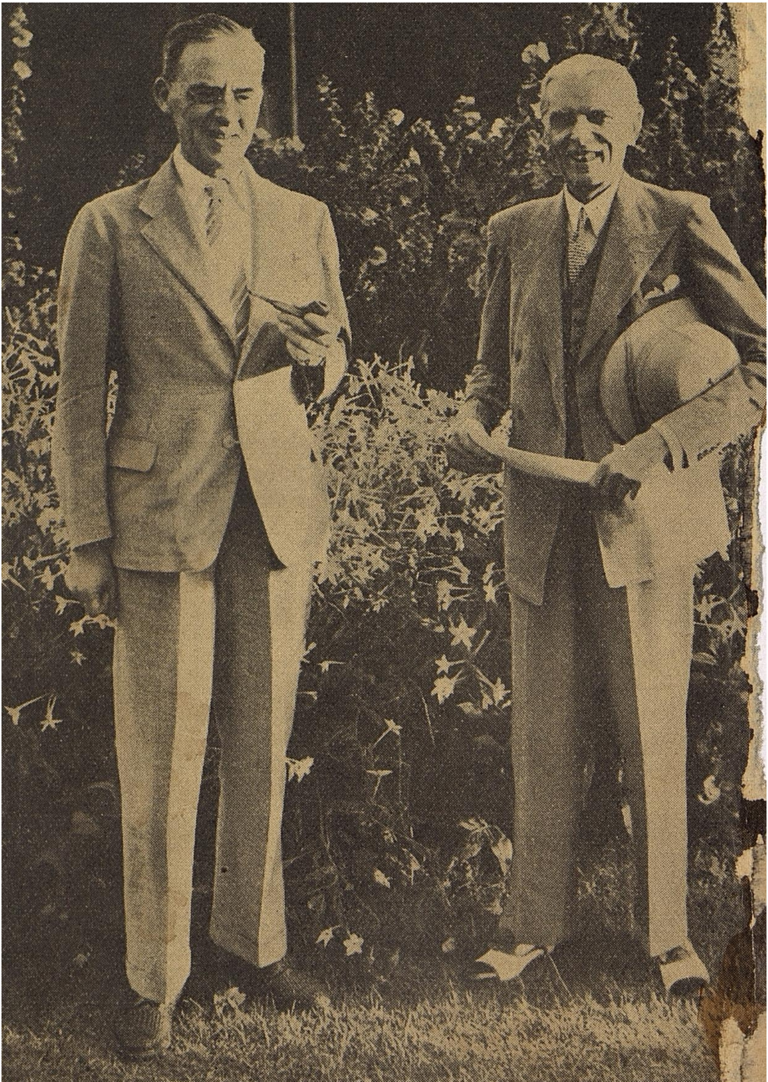


SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS AND MR. JINNAH

had once described as a 'Congress Raj',[1] a system which flatly negated Pakistan.

So much for the question of co-operation in the war effort; but there is a still graver aspect of the communal quarrel. So bitter has it become that many Indians have begun to think that force alone will settle it. Sooner or later, the grim words, 'civil war', were spoken by most of those with whom I discussed the communal question. Mr. Gandhi himself has talked of its possibility coolly enough. Many sober-minded men, indeed, are thinking that India may have to tread the Chinese road before she attains a final solution of her major problem, be it union or partition.

III. ON THE EVE OF THE MISSION

It might have been supposed that the gravity of the danger now fast approaching the Indian frontier would have brought about the formation of something like a 'common front'. But it did not. Broadly speaking, the atmosphere in India was not bettered by the Japanese menace; it was worsened.

That does not mean that any considerable body of Indian opinion was tempted under pressure of the crisis to forswear its anti-Axis convictions. In India, as elsewhere, Japanese propaganda had been busy before the war, and now the Tokyo broadcasters were dinning into Indian ears the legend that the Japanese, fellow Asiatics and possessing in their Buddhist faith a cultural link with India, were only coming to deliver her from British bondage. 'Let Indians rise and help them to drive the British out!' As far as one could judge, these appeals had little, if any, effect, except in those groups in Bengal which have been for many years addicted to revolutionary terrorism and which are still prepared to take their orders from Mr. Subhas Bose, even if they are given from Berlin. The two peoples of the outer world with whom the bulk of the Indian nationalists feel most sympathy are the Russians and Chinese, and they know that the Japanese are only waiting for the favourable moment to attack the eastern flank of Russia and that they have been engaged for years—who can doubt it?—in freeing their fellow Asiatics in China from the

[1] *The Unity of India* (London, 1941), p. 63.

domination of the West. It is said, and I can well believe it, that many Indian listeners-in have preferred to get their news from Berlin rather than London and have heard, not altogether without relish, of reverses which might temper British pride. But the news from Malaya and then from Burma could not be taken in that spirit. The fighting and the bombing it recorded were coming much too close.

But, if Indian opinion was not and is not pro-Japanese, yet, as, on one line after another and at sea as well as on land, the Japanese advance continued, it tended to become to some extent defeatist. It is not too easy for us Englishmen to realize that other people do not share the certainty we feel at home as to ultimate victory; and many Indians have been at least a little dubious since the first triumphant German rush across the map of Europe. The effect on such doubters of Pearl Harbour and all that followed it can be imagined. Nor did those Indians who realized that the vast industrial power of the United Nations was bound to be decisive in the end suppose that in the meantime the security of India could be guaranteed. On the contrary, only wishful thinkers could feel any sort of certainty that Calcutta was not doomed in due course to share the fate of Hong Kong, Singapore, Rangoon. For the shield of British sea-power which had for more than a century protected India from all aggressors had at last, it seemed, been broken. The Japanese Navy now commanded the Bay of Bengal, and the long eastern coastline of India lay open to invasion. Once a Japanese army had landed, would the British and Indian troops be better able to prevent its progress into the heart of the country than they had been elsewhere?

What effect had this growing anxiety on the Indian attitude to the British? Among those Indians who have shared from the first in the war effort and have never agreed with the Congress' root-and-branch indictment of the British record in India, the effect was good: they felt themselves drawn closer by the common danger to their British colleagues and allies. But most Congressmen, though not quite all, and also some more moderate politicians, reacted otherwise. Nervousness strains the temper, and it is understandable enough that people who had been so often told that, if Britain had taken away their freedom, she had paid for it by giving them the *pax Britannica,* should vent their anger on the British Government. And this new bitterness inevitably

sharpened the nationalists' earlier resentment at the false position, as they conceive it, which had been forced on India from the outset of the war. Some of them, indeed, were now more indignant than ever at India's commitment to war without her consent because it meant a disastrous entanglement which somehow should have been avoided. 'Why could not India have followed Eire's example? Would India have been in any danger from Japan if it had not been coloured red on the map?' And, if the non-pacifist Congress leaders had never expressed a desire that India should be morally neutral in the world conflict of ideals, they now complained more angrily than ever that they could not take part in it. 'We cannot fight', was Pandit Nehru's constant cry, 'to defend a freedom we do not possess.' Most of these leaders still refused, moreover, to differentiate between Britain and her enemies. It had been hard to believe that they really thought there was nothing to choose between British imperialism and German. It was harder still to believe that they really thought Britain's conduct in Asia was as wicked as Japan's. Yet that is what they said or at least implied.

That the old Congress attitude to Britain and the war had thus not merely been confirmed, but stiffened and exacerbated by the menace of the advancing Japanese, was clearly shown at the time of the visit paid to India by the Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang. Their object was to rally Indian public opinion to the defence of India as an essential complement to the defence of China, and to that end they wisely met and talked to Indian politicians as well as to members of the Government and the Army chiefs. But it was difficult to resist the impression that public interest during the visit, at any rate among nationalists, was concentrated not so much on what India could do to help China, though sympathy with China was deep and genuine, as on what diplomatic pressure the Generalissimo might bring to bear on the Government to concede the nationalists' demands. No better illustration could be given of Congress' 'divided mind' on this as on other aspects of the war than an incident which occurred when the Chinese visitors were at Delhi. On February 14 Madame Chiang addressed a gathering of Indian women and appealed to them to do all they could to save India from the fate of China. After making a more or less formal speech, she spoke again, *extempore* and, as she said, from the heart. The account

she then gave of the cruelties inflicted by the Japanese on Chinese women and children was terrible in its unflinching realism and deeply stirred the emotions of her listeners. But the note which a leading Congresswoman chose to sound at the close of the speech was at once curiously irrelevant and in grating discord with the prevailing mood. 'Let nobody imagine', she said, 'that it can make any possible difference to us whether it is the Japanese or the British who rule India.'

Nor did the Japanese menace have any visible effect on the Hindu-Moslem quarrel. On the contrary, the nearer the enemy approached the gates of India, the hotter it seemed to grow. On February 1 the Japanese had occupied Moulmein and on February 8 they landed on Singapore Island. But the issue of *The Dawn*, the weekly organ of the Moslem League, for the latter date made only one brief and casual reference to the war. Its columns were filled with bitter anti-Hindu controversy and its front page bore a flaming manifesto: 'Pakistan is our deliverance, defence, destiny.... Pakistan is our only demand...and by God we will have it.' Singapore surrendered on February 15. On February 21 and 22 the Working Committee of the League passed two main resolutions. The first drew attention to 'the growing danger of the war to India' and bade Moslems be prepared to face it 'with equanimity, courage, and fortitude'. The second referred to the proposals for an interim government recently made by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru on behalf of the Non-Party Conference which, because they completely ignored the two-nation theory, had been instantly repudiated by the League. 'If the British Government are misled into accepting them, Muslim India will without doubt revolt against any such a decision.' 'Revolt', it was afterwards explained, did not mean armed rebellion, but it was not a felicitous word to use on the eve, as it seemed, of a Japanese invasion. And it was a provocative word for Hindus. 'We have faced more serious revolts in the past', said Mr. Savarkar on March 1. 'Why hold your threat in abeyance? Why not come out with it to-day? Hindus . . . are four times the Muslims numerically and have the same arms and penal codes to defend themselves which Muslims have.'[1] Clearly the rule that danger from without acts as a solvent of dissension within did not apply to India in those anxious days.

[1] *Tribune*, March 4, 1942.

But there was one notable exception. In a series of public speeches in the chief towns of Madras, Mr. Rajagopalachari discarded at last the claim, reiterated by Mr. Gandhi and other Congress spokesmen for years past, that the Congress Party was the only authoritative representative of all Indian nationalists, including the Moslems and other minorities. 'It is a mistake to imagine', he declared, 'that Congress is asking for Congress Rule. . . . What it desires is democracy.'[1] Still more striking was his bold attempt to moderate Hindu-Moslem discord. 'With the danger so near', he said, 'the old divisions between community and community become irrelevant', and he went on to speak of 'the principal political organizations over which such illustrious persons as Mahatma Gandhi and Qaid-i Azam[2] Jinnah presided'. 'These are not small individuals', he went on: 'one has become almost as famous as the other and both of them are tremendously popular in the country.'[3] These were remarkable words, for they completely exploded the orthodox theory, still voiced from time to time in the House of Commons, that the majority of the Moslems are in the Congress ranks. But Mr. Rajagopalachari did not pursue the subject further. He had doubtless observed that not a word had been said in his support by any of his colleagues on the Working Committee.

Moreover, those speeches of Mr. Rajagopalachari's were essentially war speeches. No other Congressman during these weeks, when the Japanese were steadily coming nearer, expressed so firm a spirit of resistance. 'With all the handicaps created for us', he declared, 'it is still the duty of the Indian people to die in self-defence.'[4] He insisted, it is true, in the same language as his colleagues that the only way to rouse the mass of the people to defend their country was to devolve the responsibility for that defence on to their own leaders: there must be a 'transfer of power'. 'The only strategy that will outwit Japan is the acknowledgement of India's indefeasible right to freedom.'[5]

Another Indian leader who was evidently resolved to fight the Japanese was Mr. K. M. Munshi, who had proved himself a hard-headed and strong-minded Home Minister in the Congress Government of Bombay, but had broken away from Congress

[1] *Hindu*, February 12, 1942. [2] Qaid-i Azam means 'Mighty Leader'.
[3] *Statesman*, January 23, 1942. [4] *Hindu*, February 11, 1942.
[5] ibid., February 14, 1942.

when Mr. Gandhi launched it on its pacifist campaign. Mr. Munshi held, like Mr. Rajagopalachari, that a united war front could only be achieved if a new National Government were established.

What did these leaders mean by the terms they used, but never precisely defined? By 'National Government' they evidently meant a new government of party leaders. It was generally understood that they wanted the members of the Central Executive Council to be 'unofficial' Indians, and that, in particular, though it was never suggested that General Wavell's services as Commander-in-Chief should be dispensed with, there should be a separate Indian Minister of Defence. So much was plain, but what was meant by 'transfer of power' ? The language on this vital point was vague. The Government was to 'command the confidence' of the parties in the legislature, it was 'to give the people effective control', it was to be 'a Government with plenary power'. But in all this the cardinal constitutional issue was evaded, or at least not explicitly determined. Were those leaders content with something akin to the quasi-Cabinet government in which they had taken part in the Provinces? Or did they want full Cabinet Government on the British or Dominion model? Surely not the latter ; for that would involve a full-scale change in wartime. It would mean complete independence at once.

This, as the sequel will show, was not a matter of constitutional pedantry: it was of the utmost practical importance; but, at the time of Sir Stafford Cripps' mission to India, the only proposals for a settlement which were not quite indefinite on the point were the 'Sapru proposals'. These asked, first, for the recognition of India's national status and, secondly, for the formation of a national government which was 'to hold itself morally responsible to the country at large', but would be 'not removable by an adverse vote of the legislature' and would remain during the war 'responsible to the Crown'. Since nobody supposes that the King can be personally involved in Indian politics, that last phrase could only bear its ordinary technical meaning, viz. that the members of the National Government would be appointed and could be dismissed by the Viceroy as the agent of the Crown.

The 'Sapru proposals' were cabled to Mr. Churchill in January, and in the ensuing weeks speculation as to his response was, together with the endless Hindu-Moslem controversy, the

main subject of political discussion in India. On February 22 Sir Tej received a provisional reply. The Government of India, said Mr. Churchill, had been invited to send representatives to sit in the British War Cabinet and on the Pacific Council. That went some way at least to meet Sir Tej on the point of national status. But Mr. Churchill deferred his decision on the other proposals, which raised 'far-reaching issues'. The rest of February passed, and most of March, and still the Prime Minister said nothing more; and until he did, it was clearly useless for the Viceroy to resume his patient attempts to bring about an understanding between the party leaders. Whatever might be happening in London, at Delhi the deadlock during those weeks of waiting was complete. And during those weeks the Japanese advance steadily continued. Moulmein, Singapore, Rangoon—how soon would it be Calcutta?

At last on March 11, four days after the fall of Rangoon, the suspense was ended, in a wholly unexpected fashion, by Mr. Churchill's announcement that the War Cabinet had 'agreed unitedly upon conclusions' as to Indian policy and that, in order to explain them and 'to satisfy himself upon the spot, by personal consultation, that the conclusions, upon which we are agreed and which we believe represent a just and final solution, will achieve their purpose', Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons, would proceed as soon as possible to India.

This startling announcement was well received in all political quarters in India but one. That a Cabinet Minister should come out and discuss his Government's policy face to face with Indians was in itself a proof of the seriousness with which the problem was viewed in London. It had only happened once before in living memory, and Mr. Montagu's visit to India in 1917-18 was to prepare a report on constitutional advance for submission to Parliament; it was not to consult the Indian leaders on an immediate political decision. Sir Stafford Cripps, too, was a Minister of no ordinary standing: it was generally held that his place in British politics was now second only to Mr. Churchill's. On the Left the choice of the Cabinet's envoy was especially welcome. Cripps, they said, was not only 'a Radical of Radicals': of all British statesmen, he had taken the deepest interest in, and shown the warmest sympathy with, Russia. He was popularly

supposed, though he himself would be the first to insist that the honour was Hitler's, to have brought Russia into the war. Surely, then, he, if any one, might succeed in bringing in nationalist India too. Last, but by no means least, he was well known and well liked in Congress circles ; Pandit Nehru in particular was an old and close friend of his; and in the course of his visit to India in midwinter, 1939, he had stayed with him and other Congressmen and had discussed with them, and with Mr. Gandhi too, a plan for an Indian settlement which, it was believed at the time, might prove acceptable both to Congress and to the British Labour Party.

But there was one discordant note in the chorus of approval. In Mr. Jinnah's mind the new move was bound to re-awaken the old suspicion that the British Government wanted to come to terms with Congress and with Congress only: and, of course, the very reasons that made Sir Stafford Cripps *persona grata* to Congress made him the reverse to the League. 'He is a friend of Congress', Mr. Jinnah publicly complained. The opinions which he had expressed in 1940 seemed to show that he had accepted the Congress case *en bloc*. Did he still believe that Congress was the only authentic champion of Moslem India? The only reassurance for Moslems was that he was not coming out in his personal capacity, but as the representative of the British Government.[1]

These suspicions were not shared in official or neutral circles. It was generally agreed that the British Government could not possibly have decided to break their explicit pledges and ignore or override the Moslem claims. It was also agreed that Sir Stafford had a better chance than any one else could have had of obtaining a settlement. But as to whether it was a good chance, opinion was divided. There were some who doubted if Sir Stafford, though many factors and particularly the personal factor seemed to favour him, could succeed in overcoming the reluctance of most of the Congress leaders to share in the responsibility for the conduct of the war except on terms which the British Government, as well as the Moslem League, could not possibly accept.

[1] *Hindustan Times*, March 24.

IV. THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS, with Mr. F. F. Turnbull of the India Office and his secretaries, Mr. A. D. K. Owen and Mr. Graham Spry, arrived by air at Delhi on March 22.[1] That same afternoon he called a Press Conference, and in the course of his opening address to it he said:

> I have come here because I am, as I have always been, a great friend and admirer of India and because I want to play my part as a member of the War Cabinet in reaching a final settlement of the political difficulties which have long vexed our relationships. Once these questions are resolved, and I hope they may be quickly and satisfactorily resolved, the Indian peoples will be enabled to associate themselves fully and freely, not only with Great Britain and the other Dominions, but with our great allies, Russia, China and the United States of America, so that together we can assert our determination to preserve the liberty of the peoples of the world. There is no time to lose and no time for long discussions... My intention is to stay at Delhi for two weeks... and I believe that within that time, with energy and goodwill, the essentials of success can be achieved.

Another passage in his address struck at once the note of frankness which was to distinguish all he said in India:

> My association in the past has been more close with my friends in Congress ['friend' had been Mr. Jinnah's word] than with the members of other parties or communities, but I am fully impressed with the need in any scheme for the future of India to meet the deep anxieties which undoubtedly exist among the Muslims and the other communities. I shall therefore embark upon my task with a mind equally open to all points of view—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and others.

Two further points were made clear at this early stage. The Cabinet's conclusions were not a radical change of policy: they were 'the natural and logical outcome of what has gone before'. And, while the Draft Declaration, in which those conclusions had been embodied, might be altered on minor points, 'no real, major, fundamental changes' could be made.

[1] Mr. B. E. A. Cook, I.C.S., joined the staff on Sir Stafford's arrival. His Parliamentary Private Secretary, Mr. Gerald Palmer, M.P., arrived on March 31.

The effect of this Press Conference—and Sir Stafford had said it would be repeated every other day—was remarkable. In the first place the holding of it was in itself unprecedented. The difficulty of obtaining close contact between Government and public opinion is one of the inevitable disadvantages of a 'bureaucratic' system and one of the chief drawbacks in Indian politics. The Viceroy's political discussions with Indian leaders have always been held in privacy; there has never been anything in the nature of a round-table conference in Delhi; and public pronouncements of policy have been delivered at long range, either in a Press manifesto or in the course of a formal speech or broadcast. In view of his position, public discussion or argumentation on the Viceroy's part has been ruled out. Sir Stafford's Press Conference was in startling contrast with this time-honoured procedure. Here was a member of the War Cabinet, no less, not only talking face to face with a gathering of Indian journalists, but inviting them to question him and press their questions home. At one point in the course of a Conference a journalist provoked some cries of protest from his colleagues at the kind of questions he was asking. But Sir Stafford took his side. 'I am accustomed to being heckled at meetings', he said: 'I don't mind being heckled.' Nobody would have imagined, before it happened, that such direct and open personal relations could be established between the British Government in London and the Indian public six thousand miles away: that a British Minister would himself discuss and defend 'high policy' with that public's representatives and be ready to answer forthwith and forthright any kind of question. No wonder that there was talk that night of 'a breath of fresh air' in Delhi.

For three days Sir Stafford stayed as Lord Linlithgow's guest at Viceroy's House, and in the course of them he interviewed Governors of Provinces and Members of the Executive Council, showing them the text of the Draft Declaration, which for the time being was to be kept secret, and inviting their opinions on it. On March 25 he moved to quarters of his own at 3, Queen Victoria Road, and began his series of interviews with the representatives of the parties and communities whom he had asked them to appoint. Mr. Gandhi did not come as a party leader—he always insists on the fact that he has no official position in the Congress organization—but because Sir Stafford

had expressed a wish to see him. Congress was represented at the first interview by Maulana Azad, its Moslem President, and thereafter by the Maulana and Pandit Nehru together. They came straight as a rule from the Working Committee which assembled on March 29 at Birla House, the residence of Mr. G. D. Birla, a wealthy 'captain of industry' who has long supported Congress, and remained in session there till the close of the discussions. Mr. Jinnah came on behalf of the Working Committee of the League, which was also in session, first at Allahabad and then at Delhi. The Jam Sahib of Nawanagar and the Maharajah of Bikanir, Chancellor and Pro-Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes, represented the rulers of the Indian States. The Mahasabha, the Depressed Classes, the Sikhs, the European (British business) community and one or two other smaller bodies also sent their representatives.

To each of these visitors Sir Stafford gave a copy of the Draft Declaration and explained its meaning, clause by clause. The reception of it, it was generally believed, was not unpromising. Objections were raised, but in most quarters there was no violent or uncompromising recoil. Even Mr. Gandhi, who could not be expected to acquiesce—as far as he himself was concerned, at any rate—in any co-operation in the war effort, was thought to have been willing at least to consider the proposals. But this first reception of the document was obviously only provisional. No firm and final opinion could be expected till it had been studied and discussed.

Before a week had passed it was evident that the publication of the document could no longer be delayed. Each of its recipients had been vowed to secrecy, but a secret of such vital import was not easy to keep, and some very happy guesses about the proposals, in general and in particular, were soon appearing in the newspapers. Sir Stafford, accordingly, decided to make them public at his fourth Press Conference on March 29.

The Conference was held in one of the spacious chambers of the Secretariat building, Sir Herbert Baker's noblest gift to India. About two hundred pressmen attended, nearly all of them Indians and the great majority supporters of Congress. The proceedings began at six o'clock and ended at eight. Sir Stafford's answers to the host of questions showered on him, many of them testing,

some of them rather provocative questions, were invariably unhesitating and unambiguous.

The journalists had been supplied with copies of the Draft Declaration. Its text was as follows:

His Majesty's Government, having considered the anxieties expressed in this country and in India as to the fulfilment of the promises made in regard to the future of India, have decided to lay down in precise and clear terms the steps which they propose shall be taken for the earliest possible realization of self-government in India. The object is the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion, associated with the United Kingdom and the other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown, but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs.

His Majesty's Government therefore make the following declaration:

(*a*) Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, steps shall be taken to set up in India, in the manner described hereafter, an elected body charged with the task of framing a new Constitution for India.

(*b*) Provision shall be made, as set out below, for the participation of the Indian States in the constitution-making body.

(*c*) His Majesty's Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the Constitution so framed subject only to:

(i) the right of any Province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new Constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so decides.

With such non-acceding Provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to agree upon a new Constitution, giving them the same full status as the Indian Union, and arrived at by a procedure analogous to that here laid down.

(ii) the signing of a Treaty which shall be negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the constitution-making body. This Treaty will cover all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands; it will make provision, in accordance with the undertakings given by His Majesty's Government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities; but will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in the future its relationship to the other Member States of the British Commonwealth.

Whether or not an Indian State elects to adhere to the Constitution, it will be necessary to negotiate a revision of its Treaty arrangements, so far as this may be required in the new situation.

(*d*) The constitution-making body shall be composed as follows, unless the leaders of Indian opinion in the principal communities agree upon some other form before the end of hostilities:

> Immediately upon the result being known of the provincial elections which will be necessary at the end of hostilities, the entire membership of the Lower Houses of the Provincial Legislatures shall, as a single electoral college, proceed to the election of the constitution-making body by the system of proportional representation. This new body shall be in number about one-tenth of the number of the electoral college.
>
> Indian States shall be invited to appoint representatives in the same proportion to their total population as in the case of the representatives of British India as a whole, and with the same powers as the British Indian members.

(*e*) During the critical period which now faces India and until the new Constitution can be framed His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort, but the task of organizing to the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-operation of the peoples of India. His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India.[1]

One or two comments should at once be made on the nature of this document.

First, it deals with three closely interlinked yet separate questions. The preliminary paragraph, together with the provision as to the Indian Union's relationship to the other nations of the Commonwealth contained in the sub-clause (ii) of clause

[1]All the documents quoted in this and the following chapters are printed in the White Paper on the Lord Privy Seal's Mission to India, Cmd. 6350.

(*c*) and the reference in the same sub-clause to 'the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands', is concerned with the future independence of India. The first four clauses of the main body of the document, excepting the sentence and the phrase just mentioned, are concerned with the method by which the new constitution should be framed, and with the British Government's undertaking to accept a constitution so framed, subject to the concurrent negotiation of a Treaty between the British Government and the constitution-making body. Clause (*e*) is concerned with the interim constitutional procedure which it is proposed should be adopted until the new constitution can be made.

Secondly, the Draft Declaration, as Sir Stafford had said himself, did not represent a drastic change of policy. It would, indeed, be altogether unfair to the British Government and particularly to Mr. Amery and Lord Linlithgow to suggest that, under Sir Stafford's influence perhaps, Indian policy had suddenly been diverted from a reactionary to a liberal course. In basic principle, in fact, the Draft Declaration was entirely in accord with the 'August Offer', which, it will be remembered, had promised Dominion Status after the war and declared that the framing of the new constitution was primarily an Indian responsibility. But, though there was no difference in principle, the Draft Declaration did make an advance on the Offer. It was more concrete and constructive. It elucidated the meaning of Dominion Status. It made it clear that the Indians would be solely, not merely primarily, responsible for making their new constitution. It proposed a practical method for making it, and a method by which the chief obstacles to agreement might be overcome. And it promised that a constitution so framed would be accepted and implemented by the British Government. It cannot be said that those improvements on the 'August Offer' were of no great moment. On the contrary, the Draft Declaration provided precisely those additional aids required to bring a settlement between the British Government and the Indian parties within the bounds of possibility.

Thirdly, as the Prime Minister had emphasized, the Draft Declaration embodied the full agreement of a united Cabinet. But was it, critics might ask and did ask, an agreement by conviction or by compromise? Had Sir Stafford, for example, come to

terms with Mr. Churchill by not insisting on something he would otherwise have liked to get? Any such suspicions were blown away by his own simple and repeated statement. 'If I alone had drafted the document', he said, 'it would have been in substance exactly what it is.'

Fourthly, the Draft Declaration implicitly ruled out any major change in the form of the constitution during the war. As will be seen later on, this was made explicit by Sir Stafford on numerous occasions.

To return to the Press Conference. Before inviting questions, Sir Stafford made a brief preliminary statement. After explaining that the content of the document was not a Declaration which the British Government had made but a Declaration 'they would be prepared to make if it met with a sufficiently general and favourable acceptance from the various sections of Indian opinion', he appealed to the Press to treat it with the high sense of responsibility it deserved. The response to this appeal was not in doubt, and it was sustained by all the leading newspapers throughout the subsequent discussions.

Then the questions began. They were applied to the document paragraph by paragraph. Thus those which dealt with the future status of India came first, and it is only with those that this chapter is concerned.

Here, then, are the more pertinent questions and answers on this subject: [1]

Will the Indian Union be entitled to disown its allegiance to the Crown?

Yes. In order that there should be no possibility of doubt, we have inserted in the last sentence of paragraph (*c*) (ii) the statement: 'but will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in the future its relation to the other Member States of the British Commonwealth'. The Dominion will be completely free either to remain within or to go without the Commonwealth of Nations.

Will the Indian Union have the right to enter into a treaty with any other nation in the world?

[1]For the purposes of historical record, the text of the questions and answers here printed must not be taken as a complete word-for-word repetition of what was said. No absolutely complete *verbatim* report of the proceedings is obtainable. But I have Sir Stafford Cripps' authority for saying that the text correctly states the substance and purport of what he said.

Yes.

Can the Union join any contiguous foreign countries?*

There is nothing to prevent it. Canada can join the U.S.A. to-morrow if it wants to.*

Can it?*

Of course it can.*

What about the Governor-General?

The constitution-making body will be free to deal with that question as it chooses.

What will be the power reserved to the British?

There will be no power reserved at all, but there will be a Treaty by which the Government of the Indian Union will undertake to carry on the protection of the minority communities which has been promised them.

Will Imperial troops be retained in this country?

No Imperial troops will be retained in this country except at the request of or by agreement with the new Indian Union or Unions.

Will the Indian Union have the right to take expropriation measures?

The Union will be free to take all measures which are open to a sovereign State to take.

Exactly at what stage does the British Government propose to leave this country?

As soon as the constitution-making body has framed a new constitution to take the place of the old one, the British Government undertakes to accept and implement the new one; and the moment the new constitution comes into operation, the changeover takes place.

Will India be represented at the Peace Conference?

Certainly.

Can you tell us clearly what you are going to give us? What is required is one simple word, 'freedom'.*

We used what we thought simple, 'full self-government'. We followed it by a definition which we believed would convey the right meaning. There is no conceivable doubt that this allows complete and absolute self-determination and self-government for India.*

*The questions and answers marked with asterisks were made at the next Press Conference on March 31.

Now that this Declaration has been made, is there any difficulty in the way of India participating in the Atlantic Charter?

None at all.

There was nothing more to be said. All those implications in Dominion Status which British statesmen had been unwilling for one reason or another explicitly to admit had been explicitly admitted. There had always been a doubt in Indian nationalists' minds, as has been explained on an earlier page, whether the promise of Dominion Status—and the sincerity of the promise itself had been doubted—meant that under it India would really be on exactly the same footing as the Dominions, and more than a doubt that it meant freedom to secede from the Crown and Commonwealth. Those doubts were now resolved. Nor was it only the full admission by a member of the British Government of all those implications: that for all its value was a relatively minor point. The major point was that a British promise on this supreme issue of Indian emancipation had been *believed*.

As I watched the faces of those Indian journalists and observed the manner of the questioners and sensed the feelings of the gathering as a whole, I was quite certain that Sir Stafford's sincerity was never for a moment doubted. About midway through the meeting, as it happened, one questioner seemed to suggest that this was not so, though I thought myself that his rather involved remarks were not meant to bear any such interpretation. Sir Stafford, however, would not let it pass. 'If I hear another suggestion of that kind', he said, 'I shall close the Conference.' There was a murmur of approval all round the room. Clearly the whole audience agreed with him.

Because, first, they were so complete and unequivocal and because, secondly, they were believed, I regard Sir Stafford's answers at that Conference on the future status of India as marking the crowning point, the really historic moment, in the story of the Mission. In a few sentences the agent of the British Government had quietly signed away the title-deeds of the old British Raj. The guarantee of Indian freedom, it is true, was only prospective, but, as will be recorded later, though the Draft Declaration was not accepted, that guarantee has not been withdrawn, nor has Sir Stafford's explanation of it been disavowed. It is quite unthinkable, indeed, that the British Government or

Parliament or people can ever go back on the word that was then so frankly given and then for the first time trusted. Unless the Germans and the Japanese were to succeed in their purpose of destroying freedom everywhere, the full freedom of India is a certainty as soon as Indians—and it now rests with them alone—can establish their own system of self-government, and only the most desperate pessimist can now maintain that that achievement is beyond their power. For those reasons the historians of to-morrow may well date the Declaration of Indian Independence on March 29, 1942.

V. THE NEW CONSTITUTION

ONCE the meaning of the promise of independence had been made plain, little further interest was taken in that part of the British proposals. It figured scarcely at all in the discussions now in progress at Sir Stafford's quarters. Nor was much made of it in the newspapers. This more or less silent acceptance of it was not altogether to be wondered at. What was there to be said about it? The pledge it gave of India's independence after the war was complete: it went all the way: there was nothing more to ask for, nothing to disagree with, except one small point of terminology. India, said Congressmen, could not be described as a 'Dominion'. The Dominions were 'new countries', creations of yesterday, products for the most part of British colonization, and peopled only by some 30 millions altogether. It was absurd, except on purely constitutional grounds, to bracket them with India, with her ancient and indigenous civilization, with a recorded history that began more than a thousand years before an Englishman had crossed the ocean, and with a population now nearing 400 millions.[1] This criticism was clearly justified. The title should have been 'Member State of the British Commonwealth'. But this, of course, was not a major issue. The Draft Declaration could not be rejected merely on a point of nomenclature, especially if the name could be dropped on the morrow of its acquisition.

[1] Mr. De Valera made a similar protest to me at Dublin in 1933. Ireland, he said, was the land of the Irish, not of immigrants, and an historic kingdom long before the days of colonization.

There was another reason why the question of independence was so little discussed. The promise of it was now undoubtedly believed, but it was a promise that was not to be fulfilled at once but only in the future—a less certain future, it must always be remembered, in Indian opinion than in ours. Mr. Gandhi was reported to have said of the new pledge that it was 'a post-dated cheque on a bank that was obviously crashing'. And even those who did not take a defeatist view of the fate of the British Commonwealth were not unnaturally more concerned with the immediate defence of their country against the approaching Japanese than with anything that might happen after the war.

Another part of the post-war proposals, however, was very differently treated. At the Press Conferences, in the newspapers, in the discussions, the scheme for making the new constitution was fully and keenly discussed. For though this, too, was only prospective, it impinged directly on the communal controversy which, as has been explained, even the Japanese menace had failed to quell and which had inevitably been reinforced by the arrival of the Mission and the opening of a new attack on the whole political problem.

The debate was concentrated on three features of the scheme—(1) the provision for the non-accession of Provinces to the new constitution, (2) the position of the States, and (3) the protection of the non-Moslem minorities.

I

The purpose of the non-accession provisions was manifest. They embodied the British Government's considered reply to the Moslem claim to Pakistan. It was unfair to say, as Hindu critics promptly said, that they directly encouraged the partition of India. On the contrary, they pointed the way by which alone (in the present writer's view) partition can be avoided. For they are based on a profound psychological truth. The story of the forbidden fruit applies to great affairs of life as much as small. The certain method of whetting a nation's or a community's appetite for something is to say that it is the one thing they may not have. Thus, just as there is small chance of India wanting to stay in the British Commonwealth unless she is free to go out, so the best hope of a single Indian Union is to assure the people of the

predominantly Moslem areas that they need not join it unless they wish. As Sir Stafford had said in his broadcast, the door must be left open.[1] And, besides this point of principle, there was the practical question. How did the Hindus propose to compel the Moslems into the Union? Only, it would seem, by civil war.

The reaction of Mr. Jinnah and the Moslem League to this part of the scheme was naturally favourable. They can scarcely have expected, indeed, that the British Government would go so far to meet their claim, since for months past they had made no secret of their anxiety lest the Congress demand for the ruling-out of Pakistan from all discussion of the future should be conceded. There was one point, however, on which they were not satisfied. Owing to the 'weightage' given to the minorities in the electoral arrangements in the Punjab, the proportion of Moslems in the legislature does not exactly correspond with the proportion of the population. In the legislature it is 50.9 per cent, of the population 57.1 per cent. The position in Bengal is still less well balanced: the corresponding figures there are 49.2 per cent and 54.7 per cent. Since it seemed improper that so momentous a decision should depend on so narrow a margin of votes, Sir Stafford proposed that, if the majority in favour of accession was less than 60 per cent of the legislature, the minority should be entitled to demand a plebiscite of the adult male population. This proposal was not, of course, acceptable to the non-Moslems. The scales, they said, were being weighted still more heavily in favour of partition. But it apparently contented Mr. Jinnah. It was understood that he and his Working Committee were now prepared to accept the Draft Declaration and bring the League into the National Government for the whole-hearted prosecution of the war, provided that the Congress Working Committee did the same.

When, in the event, Congress rejected the Draft Declaration, Mr. Jinnah, as had always been expected, followed suit. But the tone of his rejection was markedly less hostile than that of the Congress President. Nor did he reject it all along the line. His one serious complaint was that it did not explicitly pronounce in

[1] In many of my conversations with Hindus, I urged this method of dealing with Pakistan; and several of them, including two leading Congressmen, agreed with me.

favour of Pakistan. He expressed satisfaction at the recognition of its possibility implied in the non-adherence scheme; but the establishment of a single Indian Union 'appears to be the main object of His Majesty's Government, the creation of more than one Union being relegated only to the realm of remote possibility'. Nor did the granting of the right of non-accession, such as it was, do full justice to the Moslems : it was unfair, in particular, to base it on the existing Provinces, whose frontiers had been drawn for administrative convenience only. The Draft Declaration, in fact, went some way to meet the Moslem case, but not far enough.

To Congress minds, on the other hand, it went much too far. At the beginning of the discussions, the Congress Press had promptly denounced the non-accession plan as an invitation to separatism, and at the end, though not directly condemned, it was certainly not accepted in the only passage of the Working Committee's Resolution which was not crystal clear. While refusing 'to think in terms of compelling the people of any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will', the Working Committee objected to 'compulsion being exercised on other substantial groups within that area'—a reference, no doubt, in the first instance to the Hindu and Sikh minorities in the Punjab. 'Each territorial unit', the Resolution continued, 'should have the fullest possible autonomy within the Union consistently with a strong National State.'

Militant Hinduism, true to form, was more outspoken. 'The basic principle of the Hindu Mahasabha', said its Working Committee, 'is that India is one and indivisible' and it 'cannot be true to itself or to the best interests of Hindustan if it is a party to any proposal which involves the political partition of India in any shape or form.'

2

The second main subject of debate was the Draft Declaration's treatment of the problem of the States. This, of course, concerned the Princes more directly than the other parties to the discussions, and in other respects their position was quite different. For the primary object of the Mission was to secure an agreement which would make possible the formation of a National

Government of British-Indian politicians, and in the debate on that question the Princes could only be 'observers', so to speak, interested, no doubt, but aloof. With the future constitution, however, they were directly concerned, and they made two claims with regard to it. In the resolutions passed by their Chamber welcoming the dispatch of the Mission and wishing it success, they had insisted that in any constitutional settlement their treaty rights must be effectively protected. This claim was firmly pressed by their representatives in the discussions. Provided it were met, the States, they said, would be 'glad as always, in the interests of the Motherland, to make their contribution . . . towards the framing of a new constitution for India'. But they made another claim. States which decided not to join a Union should be accorded 'the right to form a Union of their own with full sovereign status'. On the first point, Sir Stafford repeatedly asserted the British Government's determination to honour its treaties. On the second he was less sympathetic. In answer to a question at one of his Press Conferences, he said, 'It is not contemplated that any Dominion should be set up which consists solely of Indian States', and he explained that States which chose to remain outside any Union would retain their existing relationship with the Paramount Power. Except on those two issues, the Princes had little to say. They could not quarrel with the method proposed for their representation on the constitution-making body—'Indian States shall be invited to appoint representatives'. Broadly speaking, their attitude to the British proposals may be described as 'benevolent neutrality'.

Congress, on the other hand, could scarcely be neutral in this matter of the States. It was an essential part of their creed that it was the peoples of the States that mattered, not their rulers, and not long before the war they had launched a vigorous campaign of 'non-violent' agitation for the introduction in the States of the same kind of popular responsible government as had been introduced in the Provinces of British India in 1937. How, then, could they accept a scheme which provided for the appointment of the States' representatives on the constitution-making body without any reference—for none at least was expressed—to the wishes of their people? There could only be one answer to that objection. The British Government is bound by treaties not to interfere in the government of the major States except to prevent a grave

abuse of power. It cannot, therefore, compel the Princes to accept the principle of popular election to the constitution-making body. The 'democratization' of the States could not be accomplished now or at one stroke, but it would inevitably be brought about under the prospective new regime, quickly in those States which joined the Union, more slowly but no less surely in those which stayed outside. But the Congress leaders were impervious to such arguments, as their Resolution showed. 'The complete ignoring', they declared, 'of ninety millions of people in the Indian States ... is a negation both of democracy and self-determination.' And they drew a dark picture of the non-adhering States as 'enclaves where foreign authority still prevails' and 'barriers to the growth of Indian freedom'.

3

The attitude of the chief non-Moslem minorities to the constitutional proposals was not unanimous. Roughly speaking, the Depressed Classes and the Sikhs took one view, the Indian Christians, the Anglo-Indians, and the European community took another.

It was only to be expected, perhaps, that the political leaders of the Depressed Classes, who number some 60 millions, would disapprove of the scheme. Their attitude is familiar. In opposition to Mr. Gandhi, whose interest in their welfare is well known, they claim to be regarded, not as part of the great Hindu society, but as a distinct community which must be protected by special safeguards from caste-Hindu domination. All that could be said to reassure them was, first, that they would obtain the same measure of representation in the constitution-making body as they now possess in the Provincial legislatures and, secondly, that the Treaty to be concluded with that body would provide, 'in accordance with the undertakings given by His Majesty's Government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities'—a phrase which, as Sir Stafford stated, was intended to cover the Depressed Classes. But those assurances were not enough. 'We are all of us absolutely convinced', wrote Dr. Ambedkar and Mr. Rajah, 'that the proposals are calculated to do the greatest harm to the Depressed Classes and are sure to place them under an unmitigated system of Hindu rule.'

Naturally enough, since their main political motif is antagonism

to Moslem ascendancy in the Punjab, the opposition of the Sikhs was focused on the non-accession proposals. The Sikh All-Parties Committee were the quickest to draft their Resolution and present it to Sir Stafford.

> Ever since the British advent [it ran] our community has fought for England... and this is our reward that our position in the Punjab... has been finally liquidated.... Why should not the population of any area opposed to separation be given the right to record its verdict and to form an autonomous unit?....We shall resist by all possible means separation of the Punjab from all-India Union.

Even less than the representatives of the Depressed Classes could the Sikh leaders be reassured by the prospect of the consideration they would certainly be given in the discussions of the constitution-making body or of the protection no less certainly to be assured them in the Treaty. And this uncompromising spirit was particularly unfortunate in a community which, though relatively small—it is about six millions strong—provides so many soldiers for the Indian Army.

Of the other non-Moslem minorities it may be said in brief that they all of them more or less acquiesced in the constitutional proposals. The Indian Christians held that an overwhelming non-Christian majority did not mean that the principle of religious toleration would be discarded. The Anglo-Indians were more apprehensive of their fate, and pleaded that the 'safeguards' given them under the present constitution should be kept in force at least for fifty years. Labour, represented by Mr. Joshi, raised no difficulties about the constitutional scheme except as to the non-adherence provisions. As to that, he hoped that the constitution would satisfy the Moslems and so partition would be avoided.

None of these minorities can have expected more from any new settlement of the Indian problem. But the British business-men may well have been surprised. No mention was made of them in the Draft Declaration; for, as Sir Stafford explained to the pressmen, they were not one of 'the racial and religious minorities' to be protected by the Treaty. He was still more explicit. 'We are not going', he said, 'to make any condition in the Treaty as regards guaranteeing the vested rights of British interests in India.' This change of attitude in London may have been some-

thing of a shock to the British community in India; but it is proof of a changed attitude on their part also that their representatives were ready to acquiesce in it. At earlier stages of constitutional advance they have always insisted on special safeguards. In the Act of 1935 they secured a separate chapter to protect them from unfair discrimination. But, while they desire to retain the formal status of a 'minority', they have now for the most part come to the conclusion—such at any rate was the impression I got from my talks with several of them—that legal guarantees are not much use in business, that the only surety for any trade in India is Indian goodwill, and that in future they must take their chance in equal competition with their Indian rivals.

Lastly, the Liberals. In a close-knit memorandum, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jayakar concentrated mainly on the non-accession proposals. 'The creation of more than one Union,' they declared, 'however consistent in theory with the principle of self-determination, will be disastrous to the lasting interests of the country and its integrity and security.' But, if all attempts to bring about an intercommunal agreement should fail and the 'overwhelming wishes' of Provinces for separation should be manifested, then the experiment should be permitted on condition that a majority of 65 per cent were obtained for the decision in the legislature—a condition, it may be observed, which, unless the frontiers were re-adjusted, debarred Pakistan.

Such was the course of the discussion on the proposals for the framing of the new constitution. One feature of it stands out. With minor exceptions, all the parties to it condemned the scheme, though not always for the same reasons. The question, therefore, arose whether, in view of these objections, it would be possible for Sir Stafford 'to procure the necessary measure of assent', as the Prime Minister had put it, to enable the Draft Declaration to be in fact declared. Sir Stafford had stated at the outset that the proposals must be accepted or rejected as a whole. But was the opposition to the constitutional scheme really to prevent a settlement? If the parties who opposed it were willing, having registered their disapproval of this or that part of the Draft Declaration, to accept the rest of it and join in framing a National Government, it would surely be difficult to

withstand them. On one point—the composition of the constitution-making body—the Draft Declaration itself had contemplated that the leaders of the principal communities might agree on some alternative method. Were the other points so cast-iron that the same possibility of alteration by agreement must be denied them? That certainly was not the general opinion at Delhi, and it seems unlikely that London would have thought otherwise.

Lastly, it must be noted that, though it obtained so small a measure of approval, the constitutional scheme had one outstanding merit. It established the British Government's sincerity on precisely those major points on which it had been most obstinately questioned. Hindu-Moslem discord, the rights of the Princes, British commercial interests—the scheme proposed a method of overcoming each of these obstacles to Indian freedom. If these had been, as Congressmen averred, the last entrenchments of British imperialism on Indian soil, they had now been evacuated one and all and in full daylight.

VI. DEFENCE

THE discussion on the proposals for a new constitution was not, of course, a separate discussion: it was part of the debate on the Draft Declaration as a whole. Nor should it be assumed that, because on those constitutional questions there was much more disagreement than agreement, the course of that debate was setting steadily towards a breakdown. Apparently the crucial question was Defence, and, as the first week went by, it seemed as if the fate of the Mission would be determined by the decision of the Congress Working Committee on that one issue. What were the omens? Apart from the inferences that might be drawn from Sir Stafford's interviews with the Congress leaders, there was a constant stream of rumour, emanating mainly from the journalists who haunted the precincts of Birla House. All the gossips were agreed that of the fifteen members of the Committee Mr. Gandhi could count on the unwavering support of four or five, headed by that whole-hearted adherent of 'non-violence', Dr. Rajendra Prasad; nor was it

thought that Mr. Gandhi's departure for Wardha on April 3, on account of his wife's illness, would mean any weakening of conviction in this group of his disciples. Of the others, it was believed, rightly or wrongly, that Mr. Rajagopalachari was all out for a settlement. The scholarly Congress President, too, was supposed to favour compromise. On Pandit Nehru opinion was divided. Many held that he was doing his utmost to persuade his colleagues to come to terms with Sir Stafford. Others felt it would be more difficult for him than for any of the others to throw overboard the official policy in the framing of which he had taken such a leading part. That there were differences of opinion, on other grounds than 'non-violence', was not in doubt. Guesses in those early days foretold a clear majority against a settlement. But, as the discussions proceeded, centred, as has been said, on Defence, the prospects seemed steadily to brighten.

The first encouraging factor was the immediate concession of two major points, one on each side. The Congress leaders at once disavowed any desire to interfere with the Commander-in-Chief's control of military operations. Sir Stafford, for his part, took it for granted that, if a National Government were formed, some kind of Defence Department would be entrusted to an Indian. Both sides were agreed, moreover, on a third point—the defence of India 'as part of the world war effort' must be controlled by the British War Cabinet and the Pacific War Council. To enable India to have her due share in that control, it was proposed that 'representative Indians' (i.e. non-official party leaders) should be appointed on both those bodies, and this offer, tacitly at least, was accepted. Nor was there any controversy as to the definition in the Draft Declaration [1] of the task of the Government of India. It was that 'of organizing to the full the military, material, and moral resources of India'.

The primary question of debate, it was soon apparent, was the extent of the Indian Defence Minister's authority. It was on the moral resources that the Congress leaders laid most stress. If they were to be enabled to make an effective appeal to their people, to convince them that the war was *their* war, and to kindle in them a spirit of mass resistance to Japanese aggression, then their Defence Minister must be a real Defence Minister. The

[1] The original text had been emended on this point after the Mission's arrival in order to make it clearer.

difficulty, of course, was that the Commander-in-Chief, whose control of the armed forces (it must be stressed again) was not disputed, must be a real Commander-in-Chief. It was a question, therefore, of the division of functions, a highly technical question involving a close examination of the structure of the existing departmental organization of Defence. On April 1 Sir Stafford suggested to Maulana Azad that it might help to clarify the position if he and Pandit Nehru were to meet the Commander-in-Chief. This offer was accepted, but the meeting could not be arranged at once because General Wavell had gone to inspect the Burman front.

On the evening of April 2 the Working Committee's Resolution was formally presented. As will be seen in the next chapter, it amounted to a flat rejection of the Draft Declaration on all points except the promise of independence. The first effect of this document was naturally chilling; but on second thoughts it seemed more than probable that it was intended, not as an ultimatum, but as a maximum claim, as a basis for further negotiation. It was clear, indeed, from the Maulana's statement that the Resolution was not to be published at present, that the discussions were expected to continue, and clearer still next day when the interview with the Commander-in-Chief was duly held and was generally believed to have been helpful.

On that day (April 3) Colonel Louis Johnson arrived at Delhi at the head of the American Economic Mission, which had been recently appointed to inquire into the possibilities of industrial expansion for war purposes in India, and acting in that capacity as President Roosevelt's 'personal representative'. On April 5 he had a long talk with Pandit Nehru at the latter's request, and another with him and Maulana Azad on April 6. On April 8 he saw them again twice. Comings and goings at Delhi at this time were watched by innumerable eyes; and the rumour was soon abroad that Colonel Johnson's arrival at this juncture was no accident. The American President, it was freely asserted, was determined to have a say in the Indian settlement. And presently it was rumoured that Sir Stafford and the Colonel were at odds. The final quietus to such mischief-making was given by Sir Stafford himself in the speech he made in the House of Commons soon after his return.[1] He explained that Colonel

[1] *Hansard,* House of Commons, April 28, cols. 826-43.

Johnson's earlier interview with the Congress leaders was arranged in consultation with the Viceroy and in accordance with his advice.

> Thereafter, on my suggestion, and in accordance with his own personal desire to be of any assistance that he could, he had other interviews which were of great help in clarifying the situation. At no time did he act otherwise than in a purely personal capacity, and he, like two or three of my good Indian friends, merely did his best to give what help he could to the parties. I am personally most grateful to him, and I am sure the leaders of Congress are similarly so. But I wish to make it abundantly clear that there was no question of any American intervention, but only the personal help of a very able American citizen.

A second and no less mischievous rumour which was abroad a few days later may be dealt with at this point. There was a rift, it was said, between Sir Stafford on the one hand and the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief on the other, and behind the latter stood the 'old guard' in the Cabinet at home. On this matter, too, let Sir Stafford speak for himself:

> I naturally maintained the closest contact with the Viceroy. We met, in fact, every night during my stay and discussed the progress of events. I also maintained the closest contact with the Commander-in-Chief, and both of them were most helpful, but the responsibility for what was done was mine and was not theirs. There was a tendency in some Indian quarters to suggest that they were responsible for the difficulties over Defence. Nothing could be further from the truth.

To return to the discussions, three formulæ on the division of functions were successively submitted to the Working Committee. This did not imply an attempt to pare down the irreducible kernel of control to be retained by the Commander-in-Chief, but rather a search for the language most likely to be acceptable to the Congress leaders. Only the third and last, therefore, need be dealt with here. It proposed, in brief, that the Defence Department should be in charge of a representative Indian and should deal with all matters of Defence not dealt with by the Commander-in-Chief, who would now be known as 'War Member' and his department as the 'War Department'. Lists of the functions to be discharged by the two departments were

appended. Those allotted to the Indian Member were necessarily not the more important ones, but their concentration in his hands, as Sir Stafford said in the House of Commons, 'would in fact have made the new Defence Department one of the largest of all departments in India'. It was possible, moreover, to make too much of this particular question. As Sir Stafford pointed out to the Congress leaders, in wartime the whole Government is dealing with Defence. Finance, civil defence, communications, supply, labour—all these departments are almost as closely concerned with the war effort as the Defence Department itself, and all of them, it was understood, would be in Indian hands.

The Working Committee received this formula early on April 8, and for two days it was in almost continuous session. They were days of acute suspense. There was nothing more to be said on the British side. We could but wait and hope in the sultry atmosphere of the Indian spring. The 'hot weather' was only just beginning, but the temperature rose one day to 100° in the shade. Nor was the tension of those days due only to the fact that the fate of the Mission was about to be decided. Another and far graver issue was at stake. Even since the discussions had begun, they had been overshadowed—at Birla House as well as at Queen Victoria Road—by the course of events elsewhere. On March 25 the news had come of the Japanese occupation of the Andaman Islands. The British evacuation of Taungu was known on April 1, of Prome on April 3. As the discussions reached their climax, the Japanese were rapidly continuing their seemingly irresistible advance. On April 5 came the air-raid on Colombo. Next day the first bombs fell on Indian soil, at Vizagapatam and Cocanada. A little later it was wrongly reported from Chungking that Akyab, a town on the Burman coast only fifty miles from the frontier of Bengal, had fallen, and another false report told of an air-raid one hundred miles inside it at Chittagong. Trincomalee, the headquarters of the British Fleet, was raided on April 9. More alarming than any of these facts or rumours was the knowledge that Japanese warships were at large in the Bay of Bengal, and that the Japanese command of the sea approaches to the Indian coast had not so far been disputed.

But, if the news from the war zone was depressing, that from the home front at Delhi was the reverse. On April 6 the balance of opinion began to turn in favour of a settlement. In the language

of the race-course, the odds, hitherto against, fell to 'evens' and presently rose to 'six to four on'. The report, next morning, of a speech by Pandit Nehru in his old vein, attacking the Princes and the Treaties and ruling out all possibility of acquiescence in the *status quo*, only checked this growing optimism for a moment. Maulana Azad and Pandit Nehru had another interview with Sir Stafford that day, and, though only the first two formulæ were then under discussion, the odds were rising still that night. On April 8 it was being said on all sides that a clear majority of the Working Committee had accepted the third formula. If proof were needed of the almost universal desire for a settlement, it was afforded by the unmistakable sense of relief and satisfaction that then prevailed. In the first bright days of the Mission it had seemed just possible that the friendly understanding which so many Indians and so many Englishmen had long desired was actually within reach. It seemed more than a possibility now. Many thought that it was certain.

On the morning of April 9 the Working Committee was still sitting. They were polishing up the terms of their acceptance, said the optimists: it would probably be presented by midday. But midday came, and still no word from Birla House. The delay was disquieting, for it seemed to imply a hitch. But it was known in the course of the afternoon that Mr. Savarkar had intimated that the Mahasabha, while maintaining its opposition to the constitutional proposals, was willing to take its part in a National Government, and a little later it was rumoured that Mr. Jinnah had accepted. Though the second report was evidently premature, both seemed to show the way the wind was blowing. At last a message came from Birla House to say that the Maulana and the Pandit would be coming at half-past five. Their arrival was awaited, not, of course, with anything like certainty, but with something more than hope. The interview would be brief, thought the more sanguine of us; a clearing-up of a few uncertain details. The two delegates were punctual. For more than two hours they talked behind closed doors with Sir Stafford. When they came out at eight o'clock it was clear that all our calculations had been wrong. The Working Committee, it appeared, were insisting on immediate independence.

A grain of hope was left. The Committee were to meet next morning, the Maulana had told Sir Stafford, and would meet

again, if necessary, in the afternoon, to make their final decision in the light of this last interview. It would certainly be communicated before night.

April 10, the last day of the Mission's work at Delhi, was its worst. The whole atmosphere had changed. But, when it was known at lunch-time that the Committee had not dissolved, but only adjourned, it looked as if they had not made up their minds. Was it not just possible that the advocates of a settlement—and surely some were left—might at the last moment turn the tide? Those who were waiting at the Mission's quarters will long remember, I think, how slowly that afternoon dragged on. The end came soon after sunset. About seven o'clock a sealed envelope was handed in. It contained a complete and conclusive rejection of the British proposals.

VII. THE BREAKDOWN

THE document began with a reference to the Resolution of the Working Committee which, as has been seen, was communicated to Sir Stafford on April 2, and went on to explain that the subsequent discussions had not induced the Committee to change the opinions they had then expressed. These opinions have been recorded in the two preceding chapters and need not be repeated here. Nor did the Maulana repeat them, except with regard to Defence. The proposals in their final form, he complained, were too vague and too limited to enable Indians to 'feel that they are fighting for their country's freedom under national leadership'. But the letter made it evident that the primary reason for rejection was a matter of Defence, only in so far as Defence would have been the primary task of the whole of the National Government to be formed as the result of an agreement on the Draft Declaration. It was clear that the supreme, the decisive issue was the character of that Government. It was clear, too, that in that respect the Committee were demanding a drastic constitutional change. In his letter of April 7, Sir Stafford had asserted that the Committee had 'fully understood' that no such change was possible during the war: and indeed, from the very beginning of his Mission, he had made

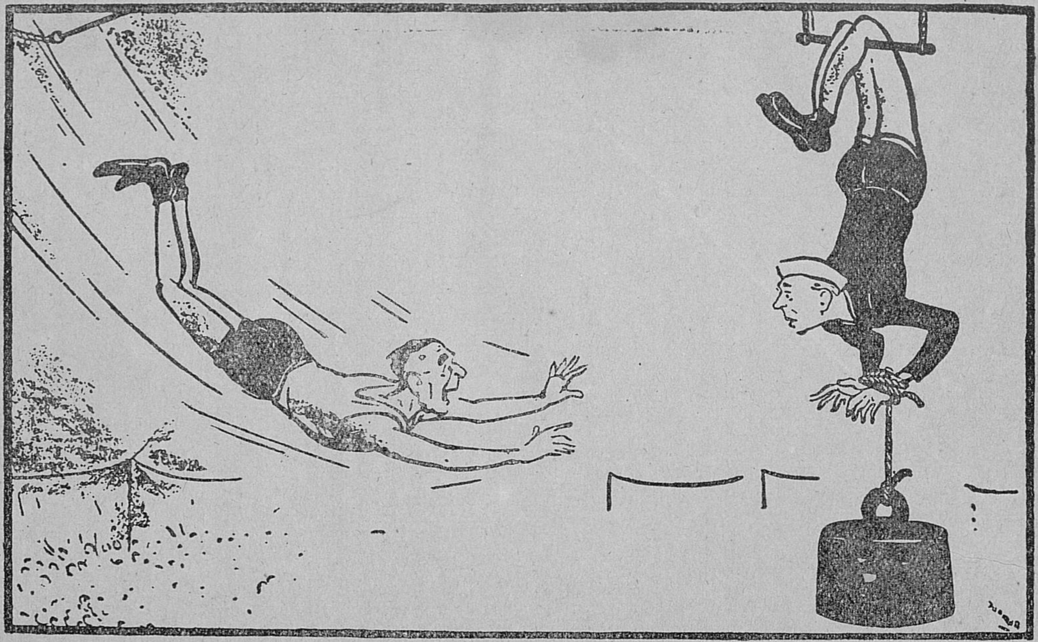
that point quite unmistakable. At his first Press Conference on March 23, the day of his arrival, he said, 'No real, major, fundamental changes can be made in the War Cabinet's conclusions'. At the second Conference on March 25 he said, 'There is no question of negotiating a fundamentally different scheme'. Broadcasting on March 30, he said, 'Everyone agrees that in these troublous times we cannot, here and now, set about forging a new constitution'. These were all public statements. As regards his private interviews, Sir Stafford spoke as follows in the House of Commons:

> I had from the outset made it clear to all those whom I saw that it was not possible to make any constitutional changes except of the most insignificant kind prior to the new constitution which would come into operation as a result of the labours of the constitution-making assembly. This fact had been accepted by everyone without discussion, and it was obvious that it was a practical impossibility to start upon the discussion and framing of a new constitution at this present time, and that if such a discussion had been practicable and had been embarked upon, it would have occupied many months, during which nothing could have been done by way of forming a new Government. Not only so, but any such alteration now made would have been thought to prejudge the situation under the new constitution, and that would no doubt have met with opposition for that reason. Therefore, any such step as recasting the constitution at the present time was admittedly out of the question.

Yet the Maulana now protested that he and his colleagues had never accepted this case.

> The Working Committee's attitude in this matter has been completely misunderstood and I should like to clear this up.... The Committee do not think there is any inherent difficulty in the way of constitutional changes during the war.... No complicated enactments are necessary....I might remind you that the British Prime Minister actually proposed a union of France and England on the eve of the fall of France....War accelerates change. It does not fit in with static conceptions.

The immediate change on which the Committee insisted was explicitly defined. *'The National Government must be a Cabinet Government with full power.'* This, the Maulana boldly asserted,



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'may be considered to be the unanimous demand of the Indian people'.

Sir Stafford at once replied, expressing his regret at the rejection of the British proposals. The objections raised in the Resolution of April 2, he said, were 'clearly not the reason for your decision'.

> The real substance of your refusal to take part in a National Government is that the form of Government suggested is not such as would enable you to rally the Indian people as you desire. You make two suggestions. First, that the constitution might now be changed. In this respect I would point out that you made this suggestion for the first time last night, nearly three weeks after you had received the proposals, and I would further remark that every other representative with whom I have discussed this view has accepted the practical impossibility of any such legislative change in the middle of the war and at such a moment as the present. Second, you suggest 'a truly National Government' be formed which must be 'Cabinet Government with full power'. Without constitutional changes of a most complicated character and on a very large scale, this would not be possible, as you realize....
>
> Were such a system to be introduced by convention under the existing circumstances, the nominated cabinet (nominated presumably by the major political organisations), responsible to no one but itself,[1] could not be removed and would in fact constitute an absolute dictatorship of the majority. This suggestion would be rejected by all minorities in India, since it would subject all of them to a permanent and autocratic majority in the cabinet. Nor would it be consistent with the pledges already given by His Majesty's Government to protect the rights of those minorities....
>
> The proposals of His Majesty's Government went as far as possible short of a complete change in the constitution which is generally acknowledged as impracticable in the circumstances of the day....

[1] It might be argued that the party nominees might be removed as a result of a change in the party caucus which is annually elected or re-elected. But for years past the personnel of the Congress Working Committee has been controlled by a small group. Mr. Bose's election to the Presidency in 1939 against Mr. Gandhi's wish is the exception which proves the rule, since Mr. Gandhi succeeded in bringing about his dismissal. That no one could be elected on to the League Working Committee without Mr. Jinnah's approval is unquestionable.

The Maulana replied to this letter on April 11. He denied that the Working Committee's representatives had ever agreed that 'no constitutional changes could be made during the war'. As to the character of the National Government, he directly charged Sir Stafford with shifting his ground. 'What we were told in our very first talk with you is now denied or explained away.' The Maulana had understood 'that there would be a National Government which would function as a Cabinet and that the position of the Viceroy would be analogous to that of the King of England *vis-a-vis* his Cabinet'. 'The whole of this picture . . . has now been completely shattered.' Not only had the British Government refused to transfer 'real power and responsibility', but the reason given for the refusal was the reaction of the communal problem on the kind of Cabinet that Congress demanded—a point which had never been debated. The letter closed on the note of bitterness and distrust which had been sounded so often before the Mission came, but had then for nearly three happy weeks been hushed. The old slogan that India's disunity was Britain's doing was raised again. All the parties and groups, the Maulana protested, would be able to come together if the British Government would stop encouraging dissension:

> But unhappily, even in this grave hour of peril, the British Government is unable to give up its wrecking policy. We are driven to the conclusion that it attaches more importance to holding on to its rule in India as long as it can and promoting discord and disruption here with that end in view than to an effective defence of India against the aggression and invasion that overhang it.

To this attack Sir Stafford made no rejoinder. The breach was obviously past mending, and he reserved what he had still to say for a far wider audience than the Congress Working Committee. On the morning of April 11, after explaining the course and upshot of the discussions to the Executive Council, he held his last Press Conference. It was a moving occasion. Though the Working Committee's decision was now known, there was no apparent change in the friendly attitude of the assembled journalists. The one marked and universal feature was regret, it might almost be called dismay, that the hopes which had risen so high a few days earlier had now suddenly faded into nothing.

To some of his listeners, at any rate, the short speech Sir Stafford made seemed more impressive than any of his previous ones. He explained that, as the Congress and the League and other bodies had rejected the Draft Declaration, it would now be withdrawn. 'We revert to the position as it was before I came out here, though not quite perhaps to that position.' The discussions had been carried on in the most frank and friendly spirit. 'There is no bitterness or rancour in our disagreement . . . We have tried our best to agree; we have failed. Never mind whose fault it is. Let me take all the blame if that will help in uniting India for her own defence.'

In the farewell broadcast to the Indian people which Sir Stafford delivered that night, he sounded the same note. 'Our effort', he said, 'has been genuine. No responsible Indian has questioned the sincerity of our main purpose—the complete freedom of India', and that alone will affect our future relations. But it is the immediate danger that matters most. 'Let us then put aside the discussions of the last month . . . while we turn our energies to the defence of India, the first step to building a new and free future for the Indian peoples.'

On April 12 Sir Stafford left Delhi by air for Karachi, and that evening, at their eager request, he met the local journalists and discussed with them the reasons for the breakdown. At dawn next day he flew off for England.

VIII. INDEPENDENCE NOW

An attempt must now be made to explain a little more fully what it was that caused the rupture. The decisive factor, as has been seen, was the clash between Congress and British views as to the character of the proposed National Government. If agreement had been achieved on that point, not only Congress, but most, if not all, the other parties—with protests and reservations, no doubt, as to the future—would have come in. Let us consider, then, in somewhat greater detail, (1) what was the British conception of a National Government, (2) how this differed from the Congress demand, (3) why this demand was unacceptable on the British side, and (4) why in those circumstances Congress made it.

I

The Draft Declaration itself did not define the character of the proposed National Government or the method of its operation. It did not even use the phrase. It only invited 'the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations'. The meaning of this as regards India must be construed in the light of what had been said and done before the Mission came. From an early stage of the war, as has been stated above, Congress had demanded a National Government. So had the Liberals specifically in the 'Sapru proposals'. As to personnel, there was no difference of opinion. Congress and the Liberals were alike in regarding the existing Indian majority on the Viceroy's Executive Council as insufficient. Both insisted that all its members, save the Commander-in-Chief, must be Indians. In any case, this was not a question which Sir Stafford could decide. As he repeatedly declared, his business was only to try to secure an agreement on the Draft Declaration. The Viceroy alone could determine the composition of a Council with which he would have to work. But it was generally believed that the Viceroy was willing to consider an all-Indian Council, with the exception of the Commander-in-Chief, provided, of course, a settlement were reached under which all parties agreed to co-operate. It was obvious, indeed, that no settlement was possible on other terms; and Sir Stafford made it plain that the National Government he personally contemplated and expected was to be, always excepting the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, an entirely Indian non-official Government.[1]

The dispute, then, was not on the personnel of the National Government, but on the method of its operation; and the British conception of this was well enough known. There was the precedent, to begin with, of the Ministries in the Provinces. They had operated, not indeed as 'Cabinets with full power', but as quasi-Cabinets. The Governor, as he was

[1] This change would have required a short amending Act of Parliament, since the existing Act prescribes that at least three Members of the Council must have had ten years' official service. It was thought that Parliament would be willing to pass such an Act as part of a general settlement.

instructed to do, had acted on the advice of his Ministers on all save certain matters on which he retained and occasionally exercised his power to dissent and override. It has been pointed out in an earlier chapter that this system worked very smoothly and was regarded by Congress Ministers as real self-government; and it may be taken for granted that, in the event of a general agreement and of the subsequent formation of a new Executive Council of party leaders, the Viceroy was prepared to treat it in a similar manner, as far as his very different position under the existing constitution permitted. It was common knowledge—Members of Council themselves made no secret of it—that he had dealt with his existing enlarged Council *as if* it were a Cabinet. But there is an important legal distinction to be noted here. Whereas a Provincial Governor is bound as a rule to accept his Ministers' advice, the Governor-General, apart from certain special matters on which he is required to act entirely on his own responsibility, is specifically entitled by the Act to dissent from the majority opinion of his Council as to any measure 'whereby the safety, tranquillity, or interest of British India or any part thereof are or may be' in his judgement 'essentially affected'.[1] Thus, if a Governor cannot legally concede *full power* to his Council, still less can the Governor-General. In either case, an undertaking not to use the overriding power would be a breach of the law. The conversion of a quasi-Cabinet into a real Cabinet would necessitate a new Act of Parliament. It would presumably have to be a long and complicated Act, and it would certainly effect a 'major constitutional change'. The most, therefore, that the Viceroy could do was to say that he would make it a custom to deal with his Council *as far as possible as if it were a Cabinet*. Since the Council would be united by its common task of defending India, serious disagreement between its Members and the Viceroy would be most unlikely. He would normally be able to 'act on their advice', and to that extent his position would be comparable with that of the King in England. Despite, moreover, his retention of the right to disregard advice, there would be a real 'transfer of power', in fact if not in law. For, if the majority of the Council were unable to acquiesce in the Viceroy's decision to dissent, they would resign. If all the Members had agreed among themselves to act as a collective Cabinet—and there would be

[1] Government of India Act, 1935, Ninth Schedule, Clause 41 (2).

nothing to prevent that—it would be a resignation *en bloc*. In either case the Viceroy's position would be very difficult. No 'alternative Government' would be available. There would be no other party leaders, no 'opposition' waiting to take office. He would be forced either to surrender or to revert to the previous regime; and to make an advance on that regime was the whole object of the British Government's new policy. Add to that the executive authority which all the Members of Council would exercise from day to day as heads of their Departments, and it must surely be agreed that the British offer was not unsubstantial.

2

But the Congress Working Committee were not content with that offer. They insisted on a 'Cabinet with full power'. The Viceroy was to pledge himself by a convention [1] to act only as its 'constitutional head'. It must be a 'free government', its members acting 'as members of a Cabinet in a constitutional government'. If that meant a major change, well and good: they had never agreed to rule that out. They must have a National Government in its full democratic sense or none. General Wavell would be conceded the same powers in India as General Macarthur in Australia. Otherwise the Indian Government would be as free as the Australian. What they asked for, in fact, was National Independence *here and now*.

3

Sir Stafford gave two reasons for rejecting this demand. The second was that the minorities would not acquiesce—above all the Moslems. He was soon proved to be right as far as the League was concerned. If the Congress demand were accepted, Mr. Jinnah told the Press on April 13, the Moslems would be 'at the mercy of the Congress rule'. The whole object of the Draft Declaration had been to secure, first, an intercommunal agreement as to how independence should be achieved after the war

[1] Some misunderstanding seems to have been caused by the use of the word 'convention', which has two meanings. It may mean 'usage' or 'custom' (hence 'conventional'), it may also mean 'contract' or 'rule'; it was used in both senses in the course of the discussions. But a misunderstanding on this point can have had no practical bearing on the final issue, since there was no misunderstanding as to what the Working Committee wanted.

and, next, on the basis of such an agreement, to bring about the formation of an interim government. Thus minority opposition to the Congress demand was in itself an obvious and conclusive reason for its rejection.

But that was not the first reason given by Sir Stafford in his answer to the Working Committee. His first reason was that 'Cabinet Government with full power' involved 'constitutional changes of a most complicated character and on a very large scale'. The Congress Working Committee, as Sir Stafford said, were well aware of that; but it may be worth while to explain the point here in greater detail for the benefit of a wider public not so familiar as the Congress leaders with the facts of the constitutional situation in India.

To begin with, the control of military operations—the one exception allowed by the Committee to the working of full Cabinet Government—cannot be completely separated from the control of general policy, and the *ultimate* decision in both fields must be vested in the same authority. As was pointed out in the discussion on Defence, the whole of the Government in wartime is a Defence Government, and to conduct his military operations the Commander-in-Chief must be certain of support from virtually all its members. He must obtain the pay, the food and clothing, the munitions, the transport, and so forth which his troops will need—all matters with which Members of Council and their Departments are concerned. Somehow or other, *in the last resort,* all this must be guaranteed.

Secondly, it is sometimes overlooked that the Commander-in-Chief is responsible for the maintenance of internal security in the event of the civil authorities being unable to cope with disorder without his aid. The use of troops to quell communal rioting is unhappily a frequent incident of Indian administration. More than one case occurred in the two or three months preceding the arrival of the Mission. There must be some effective means, therefore, of ensuring that the domestic and especially the communal policy of the Home Member is not such as to compel the Commander-in-Chief to take repressive action in order to maintain the military security of India.

The same reasoning applies to foreign policy. Indian nationalists want to deal with Japan and China and other countries themselves and in their own right, and so they will as soon as

the great change-over has been made after the war. But the control of India's foreign relations cannot suddenly in the middle of the fight be separated from the control of Britain's foreign relations and of the British forces and Indian forces mostly led by British officers which are defending India. For both, while the war lasts, there can be only one final authority. Where, in the circumstances, should it rest—with the majority of Council or with the Viceroy and the British Government?

Another primary difficulty arises from the position of the so-called 'Secretary of State's Services', of which the most important are the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Police. All the key posts in the administration, both at the Centre and in the Provinces, are held by members of these services; they have been recruited by the Secretary of State in England and in India—more than half of the I.C.S. and one-third of the I.P. are Indians—and in the last resort he is responsible for their conduct and welfare to Parliament. For that reason the safeguarding of their rights is one of the special responsibilities imposed on the Governor-General and the Governors by the Act of 1935. It is understood, of course, that these services will cease to exist, at least in their present form, when, under the new constitution, power is fully and finally transferred from British to Indian hands. Some of their members will presumably retire on honourable terms: others may be re-enlisted by the Indian Governments under new conditions. But to transform their status now and not as part of the general post-war settlement is out of the question. As it is, the introduction of quasi-Cabinet government in the 'Congress Provinces' subjected them to a considerable strain, for it had been their duty under the old regime from time to time to take part in the repression of Congress agitation. That they bore the strain was mainly due to the knowledge that the Governors were charged with their protection and had the power to ensure it, and Congress Ministers for their part, however distrustful of these services they may have been when they took office, have freely admitted that they soon found they could count on their loyalty.[1] But to convert quasi-Cabinet government into

[1] This was a matter on which I closely questioned all the ex-Congress Ministers I met. All but one of them declared that, with few exceptions, all the members of the I.C.S. and I.P. wholeheartedly co-operated with the new regime.

full Cabinet government—and the Provinces, of course, would follow the Centre in this respect—to abolish thereby the overriding powers and wipe out one of the conditions on which those services were recruited would require yet another section in a new Act of Parliament; nor could such a section provide for their immediate transfer to the full control of a quite independent government without the option of retirement. But how could that choice be offered them when the Japanese were at the gates of India? If many of them retired, the whole structure of Indian administration would collapse.

What has been said so far concerns British India. The last major difficulty in meeting the Congress demand concerns the States. One of the Viceroy's responsibilities is to ensure the fulfilment of the treaties between the Princes and the British Government and *inter alia* to protect them from violent subversive agitation on the part of British Indian politicians. Denunciation of the Princes has become, as has been seen, a regular feature of Congress propaganda. The position of the States, again, will be settled when the new constitution is framed; but in the meantime it would evidently be impossible for the Viceroy to make certain that the British Government's obligations were fulfilled unless in the last resort he could have his way in a Cabinet in which Congressmen were sitting.

In sum it may be said that there is an irreducible minimum of British civil control, inseparable from military control and equally irremovable without a thorough-going constitutional change. Both will go when the new regime is inaugurated after the war. Till then both must stay.

All the foregoing considerations must have been at least as familiar to the Congress leaders as they are to the present writer; and in the light of them one is forced to the conclusion that they can never have believed the demand they made could be accepted. They claimed, it is true, that the practical obstacles to it could easily be overcome, and that the only reason for rejecting it must be a lack of trust. But it was not a question of trust. However united the prospective National Government might be, however loyal its members to their chief and to one another, and however little they might be expected to disagree in the face of the common danger, disagreement in all good faith would still be possible and conceivably on the most decisive issues and at a moment of the

gravest danger. The real question was, then: Who was to have the last word—the Viceroy or the majority of the Indian party leaders? In all the circumstances, the British Government's answer was never in doubt, and, despite the Congress Working Committee's assertion that they were voicing 'the unanimous demand of the Indian people', it is certain that not only the members of most of the other parties, but a great many other Indians—officials, soldiers, business-men, men of 'moderate' politics or no politics at all—would have given, if they had been asked, the same reply.

In any case, the Congress leaders cannot have expected a different answer. 'Independence here and now' was what their claim amounted to, and they must have known the acceptance of that to be impossible. The very essence of the policy which Sir Stafford had been sent to India to expound was that independence, defined now as absolute and complete, could only be attained after the war and only as the outcome of intercommunal agreement for obtaining which a specific method was proposed. What the Congress asked, therefore, was that the main body of the Draft Declaration should be torn up and that Sir Stafford should straightway begin to treat with them on quite a different basis. But he had said again and again that that was impossible. By insisting, therefore, on their demand for immediate independence the Working Committee in fact broke off the discussions and brought the Mission to an end. It remains to consider why they did so.

4

The secret of that last critical debate at Birla House has been well kept, and an outsider can only surmise what arguments were used. But it seems admissible to suggest one or two points that must surely have weighed with the Committee. First, there was Mr. Gandhi. That he was against a settlement is virtually certain. He was understood, however, to have intimated that, if the majority of the Working Committee disagreed with him, he would not further contest the issue, but would withdraw with his faithful minority from active politics. Nevertheless, it was a formidable prospect for Congress leaders to take office in the knowledge that, silent though he might be and far away at

Wardha, the most powerful person in the Hindu world thought ey were in the wrong. Thus it may well have been Mr. Gandhi's opinions, though he was not there to utter them, that at the last moment turned the scale.

Secondly, it is unfair to the Congress leaders to overlook the fact that for them to accept the kind of National Government in contemplation was to throw overboard the two primary principles of the policy which most, if not all, of them had preached for a long time past. Non-co-operation with the British Government had been their watchword for twenty years. Once or twice they had gone back on it, notably by forming Congress Governments in the Provinces in 1937. But a powerful minority, headed by Pandit Nehru, had strongly opposed that move. There must be no co-operation, he had always argued, till such a 'crisis' came in India that the British Government was compelled to surrender; some day it must come, he held, and he had plainly hinted that the bursting of the gathering storm in Europe might precipitate it. With the outbreak of war and the resignation of the Congress Governments, strict non-co-operation became again the majority policy. To come to terms now was not merely to swing back again, but to swing much farther back. For the proposed agreement meant co-operation at the Centre as well as in the Provinces. And at the Centre, they must have felt, they would have to work with a much bigger and weightier body of 'officialdom' than existed in any Province: they would have to put their hands to the great machine of the Government of India which they had so often denounced as the principal instrument of the British imperial stranglehold.

Nor would co-operation be the only violation of the Congress creed. Some of their leaders, at any rate, had never abandoned the claim that Congress represented all India, including the Moslems. Having won the elections in seven Provinces in 1937, they had insisted on purely Congress Governments. But in the National Government now contemplated they would not even be in a majority: for room would have to be found in it not only for the Moslem League, which claimed equality with Congress, but for the other minorities as well.

And, lastly, they may have asked themselves whether it was in the interest of Congress or of India for them to accept *now* a share in the responsibility for the conduct of the war. It is

possible, though not perhaps very probable, that the offer of 1942 might have been accepted in 1939, but much had happened in the years between, and, now that the enemy were almost in sight, it might well seem too late. Would it not be wiser for the Congress leaders to leave the British Government to do its best without their aid and themselves to do what they could in defence of their country in their own way and on their own account?

It was considerations of that sort which had convinced the pessimists before the Mission began its work that an agreement would prove impossible; and, whatever the real reasons of the breakdown may have been, their pessimism had been justified. But there was no consolation in that, and many of those who, while not always agreeing with Congress' policy, have sympathized with its aspirations for the freedom of India must have been profoundly disappointed. For the possibility of an agreement—and at one time it had seemed on the very verge of attainment—had opened up a prospect of such close association in the face of common difficulties and dangers as might have dulled the memories of the past and done more than anything else could do to blunt the edge of the old quarrel between Moslem and Hindu communalism on the one hand and between British and Indian nationalism on the other. It was much, no doubt, to ask that, having waited so long to acquire the right to determine their national destiny, the Congress leaders should wait a little longer; but now that its acquisition was assured them immediately after the war, provided only that the United Nations won it, and in view of the practical necessities of the present situation, was it too much to ask?

EPILOGUE

A FORTNIGHT after the Mission's departure, the All-India Congress Committee, a larger and more representative body than the Working Committee, met at Allahabad, and duly confirmed the stand taken at Delhi. It is impossible, they said in their resolution, 'for Congress to consider any schemes or proposals which retain even a partial measure of British control in India. . . . Britain must abandon her hold on India. It is on the

basis of independence alone that India can deal with Britain or other nations'. More surprising was the Committee's reversion to pacifism. Pandit Nehru, for his part, was still militant. 'We are not going to surrender to the invader', he had said on the morrow of the breakdown at Delhi. 'In spite of all that has happened, we are not going to embarrass the British war effort, in India. . . . The problem for us is how to organize our own.' But the A.I.C.C. resolved that this effort was not to be of the Pandit's forcible kind. 'In case invasion takes place it must be resisted', but 'such resistance can only take the form of non-violent non-co-operation.' In other words, the majority of the older Congressmen who dominate Congress policy had repented of Bardoli and reverted to Mr. Gandhi's leadership; and the path he would like them to take was pointed out a little later in an article he wrote in his own paper, *Harijan*, deploring the arrival of more British and American troops in India. The connexion between Britain and India should be cut at once, he argued.

> The presence of the British in India is an invitation to Japan to invade India. Their withdrawal would remove the bait. Assume, however, that it does not, free India would be better able to cope with invasion. Unadulterated non-co-operation would then have full sway.[1]

Does this mean that the failure of the Mission was complete, that it had not only been unable to achieve its immediate purpose, but had left the political atmosphere in India more antagonistic, more defeatist, than it found it? Full knowledge of what is happening now in India is unattainable in England, but on the main points the answer to those questions seems quite certain.

First, the personal impression made by Sir Stafford on the Indian public may be blurred for a moment, but it will not be forgotten. His high office, his own previous record, his frank answers to the pressmen, his interviews with the politicians, which were wholly friendly to the very end, above all the fact that his word was trusted, all that has left such a mark on the Indian mind—and on the British too—that the tone and temper

[1] *The Times*, May 11, quoting *Harijan*, May 10. Since these pages were written Mr. Gandhi has acquiesced in the retention of British troops in India, while still demanding a complete transfer of power.

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of future dealings between Britain and India will be different now from what they were. And the new belief in British sincerity must have gone far to heal the 'divided mind' of Indian patriots about the war. Though the draft proposals have been rejected and are now withdrawn, the Declaration of Independence, as Sir Stafford and Mr. Amery have both declared, still stands, and in the light of it no reasonable Indian can go on thinking that there is no difference between British and German or Japanese imperialism.

Secondly, Sir Stafford, by constant and candid discussion of it in open forum, made the Indian public face the communal problem—and that, not her relations with Britain, is India's major problem—more squarely than they had ever done before. Some Congressmen may still reiterate their old charges against Britain on this head, but Mr. Gandhi himself has now admitted that independence is impossible until Indians themselves have 'solved the communal tangle'. Still more significant is Mr. Rajagopalachari's renewal of his efforts to bring about a Hindu-Moslem understanding. He has proposed that Congress should accept in principle the Moslem claim to Pakistan. And this time the opposition of his colleagues and the A.I.C.C. has not silenced him. He has resigned from the Working Committee and declared his intention of trying to win over public opinion and Congress itself to his policy. Clearly a new realism on this vital issue has been inspired by those discussions at Delhi.

Thus, on each of its two sides, as regards both Anglo-Indian and Hindu-Moslem relations, the Mission has opened a new phase of the Indian Question. Congress leaders may still talk in the old terms; but Congress is not all India, and even in its own ranks the voice of the younger generation can be heard asking, as it does in other countries, for new ideals and policies to meet the needs of a new age. And, when the tide of war has turned and the Japanese menace, which accounts for so much of the present *malaise* in India, has disappeared, the solution of one half of her twofold problem will have been made easier and that of the other half at any rate less difficult by the British Government's policy and the manner in which it was explained by Sir Stafford Cripps at Delhi.